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Adventure

Frederick R. Bechdolt
Frank C. Robertson
Hugh Pendexter
L. Patrick Greene
F. St. Mars
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JUNE 30th ISSUE, 1922
VOL. XXXV No. 3

ADVENTURE

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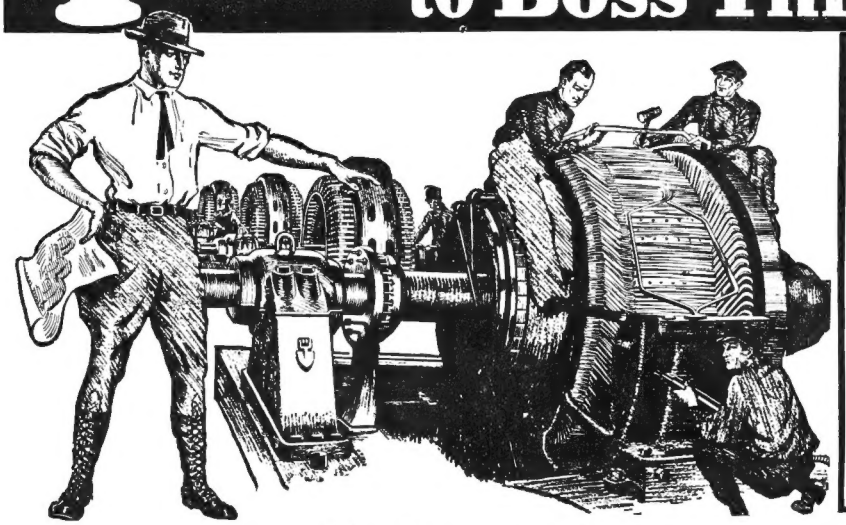

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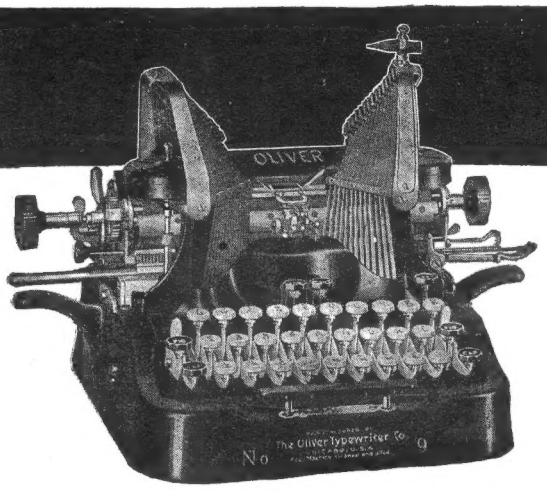

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"But what can I do?" I asked helplessly. "I have a wife and child. I'm too old to take chances."

"Too old!" fairly shouted Jim. "Why, if anything, you're too young!

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FIVE years have passed since I had the above conversation with Jim Bartlett.

I remember going home that night to a frugal supper. I remember sitting in the parlor thumbing a magazine. I remember reading the story of a man just like myself who had studied in his spare time and had gotten out of the rut.

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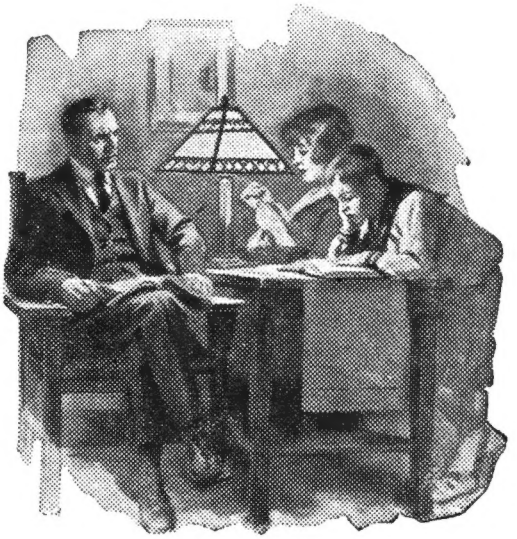

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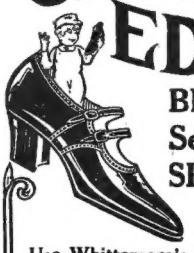

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WHEN *Jimgrim* determines to establish *Feisul*, third son of the King of Mecca, as king of the Arabs, he gets results—far-reaching and unforeseen. For here again is *Jimgrim*, single-handed, better than an army corps as he plays chief against chief in a land where the only law is individual interpretation of the Koran. "THE KING IN CHECK," a novel by Talbot Mundy, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—
the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

June 30. 1922 Vol. 35. No. 3

Adventure

THE HOLE IN THE ROCK

A Complete Novel By Frank C. Robertson

CHAPTER I

CHUB SPRINGS

IT WAS a warm day in early April. A typical Spring-fever day as the crowds of loafers in front of the two saloons of Chub Springs, enjoying the sunshine after a long and rigorous Winter, unanimously agreed. All the higher hills and mountains still wore their overcoats of gleaming white, and on the north side of even the low hills were high-combed drifts from which issued numberless tiny rivulets of brackish water from the melting snow.

In those days of the early nineties Chub Springs enjoyed, and it is the correct word, a reputation for "toughness" unsurpassed. The heart of a vast range country, it was the trading-point, as well as the center of amusement, for both cattle and sheep outfits. The hubs about which rotated the changing, colorful life of the town naturally were the two saloons—the Idaho Bar and the Salt Lake Bar.

As yet most of the loafers were sheepmen, for the larger cattle outfits had not yet trailed in from the Winter range. It was before the day of the Mexican and Basque herder, and the camp-movers in town were young, clean-limbed Americans with a love for the open spaces, and a zest for adventure equal to that of the cowboys with whom they rubbed elbows. Range was still plentiful and collisions were as yet few; but there was always a wide social gap manifested between the two classes which occasionally flared out in personal conflicts.

Around a corner came two horsemen in dust-begrimed chaps and flannel shirts, with a pack horse following. They headed for the water trough, and the loafers noted that the horses were leg-weary, and that the shoes on their feet were worn thin as wafers.

"Cowpunchers," announced the bartender of the Salt Lake Bar, as he stood idling in the doorway.

"*The Hole in the Rock*," *copyright*, 1922, *by Frank C. Robertson.*

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"Hope so," said a sandy-haired, middle-aged cowman. "I'm needin' a couple of riders mighty bad, an' so far I ain't been able to lay hands on one."

"Looks like they might be able to fill the bill," the bartender rejoined, "though naturally it looks a little suspicious when fellers ride so far this early in the Spring unless they are able to make explanations."

The strangers dismounted, watered their horses, tied them to a hitch-rack, and walked toward the Salt Lake saloon. The crowd saw that they were young, medium sized, and good looking. The taller one was dark, and rather impudent looking; the shorter, heavier man was less striking in appearance, and of a more serious cast. Closer inspection was cut off by the abrupt arrival of two other horsemen from the opposite direction. These two came in on a run, and brought their horses to a standstill with a vicious yank that brought the blood flowing from their horses' mouths.

"Well, look what's turned up—Dutch Jake and Sawtooth. The Wineglass outfit is back in the country, so look out for trouble," the bartender said softly, discreetly retiring behind his bar.

The Wineglass riders were rough-looking characters, around forty years of age. They leaped from their horses, leaving the reins dragging in the dust, and swaggered into the saloon.

"Every gentleman come inside an' have one on me," the larger man, a husky two-hundred pounder, roared an invitation.

The crowd on the porch arose as one man, surged inside and lined up against the bar. The big man surveyed the line with what seemed sardonic humor. His mouth hung open in a grin that displayed two rows of big, jagged, yellow teeth, which gave an unmistakable clue to his name—Sawtooth.

"I said *gentlemen*," he boomed. "Sheepherders fall back."

Most of the men were sheepherders. The line straightened tensely for a moment, then was broken by the impact of a hard fist upon Sawtooth's jaw, delivered by a slim young camp-mover with rather too many drinks under his belt. Before he could follow up his advantage, however, Dutch Jake kicked him in the groin with a high-heeled boot. The camp-mover sank to the floor with a groan. With a snarl Sawtooth jerked his gun, and flashed it in the direction of the prostrate sheepherder. Dutch Jake followed suit.

"Drop them guns," snapped a cool voice.

The two gunmen stopped abashed. The impudent-faced cowboy who had first arrived was covering the two with a forty-four.

"No target practise like that for you," he snapped again. "Drop them guns."

His was an insistence not to be denied. The guns rattled to the floor.

"Who are you—a sheepherder?" Sawtooth demanded.

"No. I'm a cowpuncher huntin' a job, but that don't alter matters."

Friends of the fallen sheepherder carried him outside, and the cowboy abruptly shoved his gun back in the holster.

"You got away with that for once, young feller, because we wasn't watchin' you; but don't try to hold up two men like us again. It won't be healthy," said Sawtooth savagely.

The cowboy laughed easily. His eyes were an innocent blue, but they had the slight squint of one accustomed to looking over vast spaces, and about them was a sure landmark of cool courage that could not be overlooked.

"I beat you both on the draw by a mile," he said cheerfully, "but if you want to see somethin' fast you want to see my pardner go into action."

The bullies regarded the other young cowboy, who was standing by unobtrusively. They prudently decided to let the matter rest and presently departed for the Idaho Bar across the street.

The man who had interfered for the sheepherder turned to the crowd which was watching him rather intently. If he was a cowboy, as he claimed, he had done an unprecedented, almost a sacrilegious thing, in taking up a quarrel for a sheepherder.

"Line up, everybody, an' have one on me. No social distinctions this time," he invited.

This time the ceremony was completed without interruption.

The middle-aged cowman in search of riders introduced himself to the strangers.

"My name is Jack Eutsler, an' I'm right glad to meet you, boys," he said.

"My name's Steve Malty," replied the conqueror of Sawtooth and Dutch Jake, "an' the talkative cuss there is my pardner, Bob Logan. He's a purty good scout as long as you can keep him quiet, but he's always lettin' his tongue run away with him."

Eutsler nodded.

"I'd like to have a word with you boys," he said.

The three retired to a table in a far corner of the room.

"I heard you say you was lookin' for work," Eutsler began. "I need a couple of men, an' maybe I can use you if you want the job. I suppose you've punched cows in—where you come from?"

"We ain't packin' no references this season," Steve said a little angrily. "If you want to hire us we'll do your work right, but we don't go under any cross-examination fer the sake of a job."

"That's all I ask, but maybe when I give you the lay of the land you won't care for my job."

"Shoot," Steve said simply.

"Well, I'm foreman for a small cattle outfit on the Bannock river, about twenty-five miles from here—runs about four thousand head, and belongs to a widow and her daughter. Our range lays right alongside the Bannock Reservation, and in the Spring we turn out on Warm Spring Mountain which is close to the head of Bannock River, and on the reservation. Our proper range is east of there on the slope toward the Blacksnake River, an' runs back this way along Devil creek. But the point I'm aimin' to bring out is that there's liable to be trouble with the Injuns—it's only been about ten years since some of 'em was on the warpath."

"Sounds tame so fer," Steve commented.

"Last year," Eutsler went on, "we was short quite a bunch of cattle. Whether Injuns or rustlers is a question. Then we run our stuff with another outfit called the Bucketbail which I don't like, though that's only opinion—you might see different."

"Gittin' complicated," Steve admitted.

"But the worst feature is that last year a big cow outfit that brands with a wineglass blew in from the south an' they show unmistakable signs of wantin' to hog our range. They're plumb bad ones, and the two birds you just had the run in with are only typical. They'll have their whole outfit gunnin' for you if you stay in the country."

"How much do you pay?" Steve asked.

"Forty a month and board, and there's a good chance for one of you to git to be foreman because my time is all needed on the ranch."

"Couldn't sound better," Steve said heartily.

"We'll move on," Bob Logan said, speaking for the first time.

"On which?" Steve asked jeeringly. "Dost remember, friend of my youth, that our last cash has just passed over yonder bar?"

"I'm not lookin' for trouble," Bob urged.

"Neither are we," Eutsler cut in. "Let it be understood that we ain't wantin' to hire no gunmen. We run a peaceable outfit. But if you want to try us all right. The chances are, though, that the Wineglass outfit will make it too hot for you to stay."

"Now you've gone an' done it," Bob said plaintively. "After that crack I couldn't drag him away with a four-horse team. You'll have to pay us an advance on wages—we got to eat an' feed our horses."

"All right. I'll fix you up. We'll have to stay here to-night, an' I advise you to lay low. There's apt to be a lot more of the Wineglass outfit in tonight, an' you might git into trouble."

"Maybe I can find a safe crack where I can peek in at them bold, bad men," Steve said derisively.

"All right, that's your affair. But let me tell you that if you git into trouble don't expect help from me. I'm no gunman."

"Me neither," Bob Logan added.

Shortly after the lamps were lighted the three men had supper and returned to the saloon. Steve could not be contented away from the crowd, and the other two reluctantly followed him. The saloon was filling up rapidly, and the three were compelled to wait for a turn at a pool table.

While they were still waiting there was a volley of yells outside, and a moment later a small mob of cowboys surged through the door. A hush settled over the saloon.

"There's a lot of the Wineglass riders now," Eutsler informed in a low voice. "Sawtooth an' Dutch Jake are with 'em, an' they're already polluted. It won't take long for the rest to git going. Watch your step."

The Wineglass men were ordinary-looking cowpunchers except that they were, on an average, above the usual age and their faces were characterized by rather sullen, defiant looks. But the last three men to enter were of an entirely different cast.

"There's the brains of the Wineglass," Eutsler indicated these three.

One of them, a portly man of middle age, threw a look in their direction, but seemed to take no particular notice.

"Pretended he didn't see me," Eutsler said. "That's Metcalf, boss of the Wineglass. The kid with him calls himself the Pecos Kid. He's the top gunfighter of 'em all. Don't monkey with him unless you want to flirt with the undertaker. He's sure greased lightnin' on the draw. Downed three men here last Summer. Killed one of 'em in cold blood because the feller said he looked like a greaser.

"He looks like anything but a human," Bob contributed.

"He's Metcalf's right bower unless the third member has taken his place. He is a sure enough Mexican, 'cause his name is Ortega; but he talks better English than any of 'em.

"He's educated I reckon. We don't know much about him, because he just showed up on the round-up last Fall. Rides the finest string of horses ever seen in the country, an' claims to be lookin' after a bunch of cattle that somebody is runnin' with the Wineglass. I reckon, however, that he draws Wineglass money too."

At Metcalf's invitation the Wineglass men lined up at the bar. While they were drinking Steve and Bob studied them. The Mexican, Ortega, a man of about their own age, was easily the most striking one of the bunch, partly because of the neat way he dressed, but more because in his face were signs of a higher order of intelligence.

"That's the bunch you've picked for neighbors," Bob told his partner disgustedly.

"They don't look bad to me," said Steve. "The Mexican might be dangerous if he wasn't a Mexican, but the rest don't look bad."

"Them sentiments are likely to give you a title deed to six by three of solid earth if you stick around here," Eutsler said impatiently.

After the drink the foreman of the Wineglass outfit turned his back to the bar and surveyed the crowd. He affected to see Eutsler for the first time and came over to him.

"Why howdy, Eutsler," he exclaimed, thrusting out his hand, "I never saw you or I'd asked you to have a drink."

"Hello, Metcalf," Eutsler replied.

Metcalf favored the other two cowboys with a fleeting glance, and seemed to dismiss them as beneath his notice.

"I'm right glad to meet you here, Eutsler," Metcalf went on softly. "I see that your cattle are still on the reservation, an' that you ain't usin' the range between Trail Creek an' Devil Creek. I reckon you won't mind me puttin' some cows an' calves there for a while till the grass sort of gits a start on my range."

A worried look came into Eutsler's eyes which Steve and Bob noticed.

" 'Fraid I can't accommodate you, Metcalf," he refused. "The Injuns may order us off the reservation any day—in fact they've already ordered us never to git on—an' we'll have to have our range. Besides, you know we run our stuff with the Bucket-bail, and that is properly their end of the range."

"All right, I'll have a talk with Fink. I'm glad you mentioned that little detail," Metcalf said, impudently ignoring Eutsler's flat refusal.

It was plain to the two cowboys that Metcalf held their new boss in contempt, and that Eutsler was not iron enough to stand on his rights. But at that moment there came an interruption at the saloon door. A huge, blond giant of a man, wearing wide, flaring chaps, and a large, loose flannel shirt in a cunning way to create the illusion of even greater size, strode in and up to the bar.

"Wild Pete," some one muttered.

A silence amounting almost to tension settled over the room.

"Make way. Give me room accordin' to my strength," the giant roared.

The crowd fell back hastily and Wild Pete shouldered his way to the bar through the suddenly sullen Wineglass men.

"Whisky," he shouted. "If there's as good a man as I am here let him come up and drink. If not stay back."

The bartender poured a solitary drink. Previous experience had taught the ambitious to fight shy of a physical encounter with the big Dane. More than one man had had his bones crushed in that same saloon by thinking he had a right to drink with Wild Pete. The bartender was taking no chances. The Dane drained his glass with a gulp, and wiped his heavy, yellow beard with a ham-like hand. Then he stared at the crowd coolly. It was the viking's out-of-placeness in the range surroundings

as much as his abnormal size and strength which made him dreaded by even professional man-killers.

The Pecos Kid happened to be standing directly in front of the giant, and as Wild Pete seemed to stare clear through him without seeing anything the Kid became as bellicose as a bantam rooster.

"Well, you must see somethin' interestin'," Pecos hissed.

"If there's anything interestin' about you I've plumb overlooked it," Wild Pete retorted mildly.

Then he sighted Eutsler, and walked toward him leaving the Pecos Kid writhing in impotent fury. Whatever merit the Kid possessed as a gun-fighter it did not help him at repartee.

"Hello, Jack," Wild Pete sang out in a voice that made the ceiling shake.

Eutsler nodded. Evidently he was not greatly relieved by the arrival of Wild Pete, though he was having an unpleasant time with Metcalf. The reason for his perturbation was disclosed when the Dane proceeded to make the same request that Metcalf had made but a moment before.

"I want to turn my dogeys on your range for a while, Jack, till the grass gits better in the big bend of the Blacksnake where I'm goin' to Summer. How about it?"

"I'm afraid I can't do it, Pete," Eutsler replied. "I just refused Metcalf the same thing."

"Metcalf? What does he need it for? He's got from —— to Chub Springs to run his cattle in."

Metcalf smiled crookedly. The loud voice of Wild Pete had attracted the attention of the house.

"I don't need a dogey herder to tell me where to run my cattle," he said. "I was in hopes you'd stay out of this country this year—you run too many brands."

The crowd sensed that a crisis of some sort was approaching. Not a man moved.

"I'm here, an' I'm goin' to stick," Wild Pete said.

"Then don't git too numerous around the Wineglass, that's all," Metcalf replied.

"Mr. Metcalf, if it strikes me to bed my dogeys in the front yard of your camp that'll be where they lay, an' you won't dare to steal a single one—even if that is your business."

"You are a liar and a thief," Metcalf stated slowly.

But he made no move to draw his gun.

Steve swiftly saw the foreman's plan. He would make no effort to draw, but when the Dane did, some of the fifteen gunmen would drop him. Already they were crowding in close, many were not six feet away. It was a certainty that some of them would beat the Dane to the draw. Wild Pete, however, disconcerted them by reaching for an empty beer bottle instead of going for his gun. He swung it with such tremendous force that it would undoubtedly have brained the Wineglass foreman if it had landed.

It was half way down when a gun cracked, and the bottle crashed into a hundred pieces, leaving only the jagged neck of the bottle in the Dane's hand.

It was the Pecos Kid who had fired. Instead of shooting the Dane at once he had taken the opportunity to show off his ability by first breaking the swinging bottle. The mistake was costly for Metcalf. Before the Pecos Kid could fire again, Wild Pete seized Sawtooth by the shirt front and swung him around as a shield. With the other hand he continued his blow, bringing the jagged neck of the bottle squarely into Metcalf's upturned face.

Then came two rapid shots, and each of the two big saloon lamps went out. When the turmoil had ceased, and the lights were on again Wild Pete had disappeared. Metcalf sat holding his mutilated face in his hands.

Steve Malty was grinning challengingly. It was he who had shot out the lights.

CHAPTER II

THE DIAMOND M RANCH

JACK EUTSLER'S business in Chub Springs detained them until they had time to reach the ranch by noon only by dint of hard riding. Steve and Bob were busy with their own thoughts and did not bother the new boss with questions.

Steve, with characteristic optimism was looking forward with eager curiosity, and wondering what sort of people his new employers would prove to be, and what kind of a ranch they had. Bob, on the other hand, was worrying over the rows of the night before, and wondering how long it would be before there was another run-in with the Wineglass.

An elderly woman in a plain gingham dress was standing on the porch of the ranch-house when they rode up. She smiled a pleasant greeting.

"Mrs. Gibbs, meet our two new riders, Steve Malty, an' Bob Logan. I hired 'em down at Chub Springs," Eutsler introduced.

"I'm glad to know you, boys," Mrs. Gibbs said cordially, with a handshake which put them at their ease at once.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," Steve murmured.

With his usual chariness of words, Bob took it for granted that his partner's remark covered the case for both and remained silent.

"Come on in, and we'll soon have a hot dinner for you," Mrs. Gibbs said.

"I—I— If we could go to the bunk-house," Steve demurred.

"I'll show you," Eutsler said.

They followed the foreman to the small but clean and comfortable bunk-house.

"Do we eat in the house—with the family?" Steve queried in amazement, memories of various kinds of cook-shacks fresh in his memory.

"Sure thing; there ain't no classes on this ranch—an' Mrs. Gibbs is sure some cook," Eutsler replied proudly.

"You mean she does the cookin' for the hired men?"

"Most of it. Jennie helps, an' they keep a hired girl."

The foreman's face clouded, and he continued in a low voice—

"But if this rustlin' and range hoggin' ain't stopped they won't be able to keep a hired girl, or hired men either."

"How long you been workin' for 'em?" Steve asked.

"Me? I've worked for 'em ever since Dan Gibbs homesteaded this ranch twenty years ago."

"Say, did this rustlin' begin since the Wineglass outfit came to this country?"

"Well, no. We've always lost a few head, but we blamed it onto the Injuns mostly. However, the Injuns ain't been much to steal except what they need for beef, an' Mrs. Gibbs has been so darn good to lots of 'em that they sort of protect her stuff. But we commenced to lose in good earnest a while before the Wineglass showed up.

"Got anybody in mind?" Steve asked.

"I ain't namin' anybody if I have," Eutsler said shortly.

"If we're goin' to ride here we ought to know the lay of the land," Steve argued.

"You'll find out," the foreman said, beginning to show signs of irritation.

Steve had refused to give any account of his own past, and Eutsler was beginning to wonder if there was not something more than appeared on the surface in this anxiety to learn all about the rustlers.

Unmindful of the foreman's suddenly aroused suspicions, Steve continued his questioning.

"About this Bucketbail outfit that you run with—what kind of a bunch are they?"

"They own the ranch just across the river. It belongs to old man Bates, who is an invalid. The cattle boss is named Fink, and he stands ace high with Jennie Gibbs who is the real boss of this outfit. I think that's enough information for you till you've done some ridin' yourself," Eutsler said gruffly.

"I'd rather git my information first hand anyway," Bob Logan put in mildly to head off his partner's rising temper.

"Let's go eat," Eutsler said, leading the way back to the house.

Both boys were glad they had had a chance to clean up in the bunk-house when they were presented to Jennie Gibbs.

She was a small girl, but she had an air of perfect self composure and efficiency about her, disconcerting to any would-be masher. The steady brown eyes, and high nose gave her face an expression of strength with no suggestion of masculinity. Rather, her personality was one of frank good fellowship and comradery.

She greeted the cowboys with a friendly handshake, and while they ate she succeeded in getting from Steve some of his past history. He told her that they were from Oregon, that the outfit they had been working for had sold out, and that he and Bob had simply started out to find a new range country where there was more excitement. To these statements Eutsler paid the strictest attention.

After all the foreman could not be blamed for being suspicious of strangers. In those days rustling came very near being a recognized business. Jennie seemed to accept the cowboys at face value, and it was not in Mrs. Gibbs' nature to think evil of anyone. That motherly old lady warmed to them as though she had known them from infancy.

By the time the meal was over Steve, at least, felt himself a member of the family.

"We'll git some fresh horses," Jack Eutsler said after dinner, "an' take a look at the hospital bunch which we ain't turned out yet. I'll leave one of you here to look after 'em a few days, an' me and the other one will go to camp."

Steve found an opportunity to whisper to his partner:

"You go to camp with the boss. Me, I'm the finest hospital nurse ever happened."

"Don't forget, old would-be woman-killer, that the girl is your boss, an' that she's pre-empted by the boss of this here Bucketbail outfit."

"Aw, how'd you know it was on account of the girl I wanted to stay?" Steve demanded.

Bob grinned.

"It's plumb easy to read you, old-timer—that's your worst fault. But listen to me. You've got this foreman more than two-thirds sorry he hired us already. If you hadn't got on your dignity, an' had told him the truth in the first place, that we was just two common punchers lookin' for a change of scenery he'd a believed you. Now he's about convinced that we're rustlers, or road agents, or somethin', an' the first time anything out of the way happens he'll fall on us like a ton of brick. Try to treat him more careful."

"He's an old woman anyhow," Steve scoffed. "Do I stay at the ranch, or do you?"

"You stay. I always feel more at home in a cow-camp than I do in a house," Bob said indifferently.

It was past two o'clock the following day when Steve came in for dinner. That morning he had been very busy. First, he had found a handsome black horse named Sitting Bull, which the ranchman assured him was an outlaw which none of the riders could handle. An outlaw being a thing which Steve could never resist, he had put in a couple of hours working with him. At the end of that time he had the outlaw sulkily obedient to his will, and well started toward becoming a first-class cow horse.

Then he had discovered a green knoll where the grass was better than on the surrounding meadow, and it took him considerable time to round-up his bunch of weak cattle and move them to it. Realization that he was late caused him to ride back to the corral on a run. He found Jennie waiting for him at the corral gate.

"Why, you're riding Sitting Bull," she exclaimed.

Then with evident disappointment:

"I wanted to ride your horse for a few minutes. Mine is out in the pasture."

"I'll run him in for you," Steve volunteered. "Or if it's some errand maybe I can do it for you."

"You haven't had your dinner, and I didn't want to bother you; but perhaps you had better get my horse. You see, a couple of Indians came over the divide from the Agency today expressly to warn mother to get our cattle off the reservation. While they were eating dinner some one came along and took their horses away. Of course it's quite beneath Indian dignity to look for their horses, so they are camped in the house getting angrier every minute."

"That's a —— of a joke to play, with just you three women in the house," Steve said hotly.

"Oh, there is no danger from the Indians, and we're not the least bit afraid of them—but we can't afford to lose their friendship. One of these in the house is Kebro, a big chief, and the other, War-Jack, is one of the Indian cowboys. So you see it will pay us to find their horses for them."

"I should say so. Now you leave it to me, an' I'll git 'em back here in a jiffy. It's just some fool tryin' to play smart."

Jennie flushed.

"Lucile thought it might be two of the Bucketbail riders," she said diffidently. "She saw them coming from Clearfield, the little settlement up on the bench east of here, just after the Indians came in the house. They have probably taken the horses on to their ranch as a joke. If you'll run my pony in, I'll go and get them."

Steve did not overlook the flush.

"What was the names of them two riders?" he quizzed eagerly.

"Bill Cummins and Fred Fink," Jennie replied hesitantly.

"Fred Fink, le's see, that's the foreman of that there Bucketbail ain't it? You won't need your pony, ma'am, 'cause I'll have them horses back here in a jiffy. I want to git acquainted with Mr. Fink anyway," Steve tossed back as he clattered away.

He did not look back until he had reached a bend in the road and then, turning, he saw her figure slim and appealing in the distance.

CHAPTER III

STEVE EARNS A MEDICINE STRING

JENNIE gazed after the disappearing cowboy with momentary vexation. She had planned to soothe her irritation over the affair by a stinging rebuke to Fink, and Steve had highhandedly forestalled her. Then she smiled.

"That forward young cowboy won't be so anxious to stir up the Bucketbail after Fred and Bill gets through with him," she soliloquized with some amusement.

In twenty four hours Steve had gone a long way on the road to a possible flirtation, The girl was amused, and just a little mystified by his rapid tactics.

To her surprize Steve was back in a remarkably short time—with not only the Indians' horses, but with two others as well. all saddled and bridled. Jennie recognized them as being the property of Fink and Cummins. She hurried out to meet Steve, followed by the Indians, her mother, and Lucile.

"Where did you get those other horses?" Jennie asked with a frown.

"Well, ma'am, I found two of 'em tied to a willer bush in the middle of the river, an' the other two in a corral. Naturally, as I'd never seen any of 'em before, an' as I didn't want to go askin' questions of plumb strangers, it was up to me to bring 'em all along to be sure I got the right ones."

Jennie was somewhat taken aback. She couldn't find a suitable retort, though she knew very well that Steve knew perfectly which horses belonged to the Indians. The Indians were appreciative of the way the joke had been turned on the cowboys. Mrs. Gibbs and Lucile, too, were enjoying the situation.

"Now that you know who they belong to will you take the others back?" she asked evenly.

"Well—not hardly," Steve cried, amazed at the request.

"I should say not," Mrs. Gibbs concurred. "Maybe it'll learn Fred Fink a lesson."

"Then I will," Jennie said determinedly. "If they are not taken back there will be trouble. Fred Fink is hot-headed."

"You won't have time," Lucile, the hired girl, chimed in. "Here comes Fred and Bill now."

The two men were riding hard, and both were bareback. When they reached the little crowd they flung themselves from their horses angrily.

"Who brought our horses here?" Fink, a short, heavy-set man demanded without ceremony.

"You claimin' some of these horses?" Steve queried coolly.

"You the guy?" Fink snorted, disdaining to reply to the other's question.

"If you're referrin' to these horses here, I'm the man that collected 'em," Steve retorted.

"Then you lead 'em right back to where you got 'em," Fink ordered insultingly.

Steve lead Sitting Bull away to a tie post, anchored him, and walked back to the circle.

"See me doin' it?" he asked.

Fink's hand jerked spasmodically toward his gun belt.

"Fred," Jennie cried sharply, "let that gun alone. You are in the wrong. You had no business taking these Indians' horses."

"Excuse me," Steve interrupted politely, "this happens to be my quarrel from here on. I just love to mingle with fellers that take other people's horses with no reason on earth, an' put unprotected women in danger. I just want to state that any man that would pull that kind of a trick is a coward, a thief, an' a plumb —— fool."

Fink writhed in impotent fury.

"If it wasn't for these women bein' present I'd fill your carcass full of lead," he gritted.

"Let me at him, Fred. Let me take a punch at him, an' I'll teach him some manners," burly Bill Cummins requested.

Cummins was a much larger man than either Steve or Fink. A dull, heavy featured creature, the type that is naturally born to be a cat's-paw. A role which he obviously was in the habit of acting for Fink.

"That would be lots safer than meddlin' with a gun—for you birds, I mean," Steve remarked calmly.

"Come on out behind the barn an' I'll learn you how to talk," Cummins growled.

"Men! There must be no fighting on this ranch," Mrs. Gibbs cried, shocked.

"That's all right, Mrs. Gibbs," Fink said. "But just the same we'll settle with this bird the first time we meet him alone."

Jennie stepped briskly forward. Her face was slightly flushed, but she spoke calmly.

"If that's the spirit you have, you'd

better settle the difficulty right now. All three of you give me your guns, and then go out behind the barn and let Steve and Bill fight it out—unless you want to take Bill's place. Chief Kebro—you *sabe*—make-um fight square. No double up."

The older Indian grunted with unfeigned enthusiasm.

"No fight workboy fair, me shootum, shootum," he said, fingering his own weapon lovingly.

Steve and Cummins handed over their guns at once, but Fink retained his.

"Are you afraid to face Steve without your gun?" Jennie demanded cuttingly.

"Fat chance we'd stand without our guns with them Injuns present," Fink snarled.

"Me no hurt," Kebro threw in disgustedly.

"Kebro is a man of his word," Jennie said relentlessly.

"Jennie! Jennie! What are you thinking about? Urging men to fight!" Mrs. Gibbs gasped in amazement.

"If they must fight they never can do it any safer than with me holding their guns, and Kebro and War-Jack watching them," Jennie said coolly.

"Bill can suit himself, but when I do my fightin' it won't stop at fists," Fink growled.

"Bucketbail workboy heap scared," Chief Kebro jeered.

"Scared, am I?" Fink snarled.

Rocking forward on his toes he swung a fist squarely for the Indian's jaw.

It would have gone hard with Kebro had not Steve leaped in, blocked Fink neatly with his right, and landed a left squarely in the foreman's teeth which sent him sprawling in the dust. Steve crouched in fighting posture and waited for a movement by either of the cowboys. Cummins stood back with mouth agape, and Fink stayed in the dust fingering his gun.

"Go on, go on an' use it," Steve invited. "Jennie's got mine."

Fink betrayed the yellowness that was in him by letting go of the gun, and backing away as he got to his feet.

"This foolishness has gone far enough. Fred Fink, be a sport and take your medicine. Steve got the best of you about the horses, and he's got the best of you now. The manly thing you can do is to shake hands and be friends," Jennie said impatiently.

Fink achieved a rueful grin.

"I guess my temper got the best of me," he admitted. "I'm willin' to call it off."

He extended a hand toward Steve.

"I'm plumb willin' to call it quits—but we'll leave out the brotherly love and handshakin'," Steve said flatly.

"Just as you say," Fink replied.

He and Cummins mounted their reclaimed horses and rode silently away.

Steve met the eyes of the girl squarely. She regarded him quizzically for a moment, then smiled.

"I don't think I blame you much," she said. "I suppose you think I am mannish and brutal to propose a fist-fight, but I was sure it was the best way to prevent future trouble—and anyway, those two have been bullying the people of this settlement too long already, and it was time somebody called their bluff."

Steve's heart was thumping. Somehow, the girl had divined that he had the stuff in him to face down the two cowboys. As for Fink, whom he had been dreading as a possible rival, that worthy, he knew, had fallen from grace if he had ever enjoyed any especial mark of the girl's favor.

And the girl—what a girl! Here was no timorous, cowering bit of femininity, but a regular he-man's woman. Steve fervently thanked whatever stars of destiny had guided his straying footsteps to the Diamond M ranch. However, he had the wisdom not to brag about his victory. Instead he said meekly—

"I hated like thunder to take a chance on gittin' licked, but somebody had to learn 'em to take a joke."

Chief Kebro came up and placed a bronzed hand upon Steve's shoulder.

"You come along me, workboy," he said.

Wonderingly Steve followed the Indian over to his horse.

"You good workboy—good fighter, heap good—good—" he hesitated while he sought for the right word, then jerked it out triumphantly—"good sport. Listen: Me talk. Mebbe so you chase-um Diamond M cattle along reservation. Mebbe so be trouble. Me fix-um, all right. You take-um Kebro's medicine—heap strong—you no ketch-um trouble."

With great ceremony the chief unfastened a long, white and black cow-brush from his saddle. It was evident that it was a prized possession, and one which he parted with reluctantly—and only as the

highest possible mark of friendship and esteem. He presented it to Steve with stately dignity.

The average cowboy would have become rattled and wondered what to do with such a worthless piece of junk, perhaps refusing it altogether, or else accepting it with a grin. But with instinctive tact Steve accepted it and tied it across the front of his saddle with a dignity matching that of the Chief.

"It shall always be my medicine," he promised gravely.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAR CHIEF TAKES A HAND

JACK EUTSLER, foreman of the Diamond M outfit, and two cowboys, climbed to the top of the Trail Creek divide where they rested while Jack surveyed the landscape with troubled brow. West of him loomed Warm Spring Mountain, a large, squatty series of hills and ridges from which the snow had gone off some time previously, a fact due to the numerous warm springs on it.

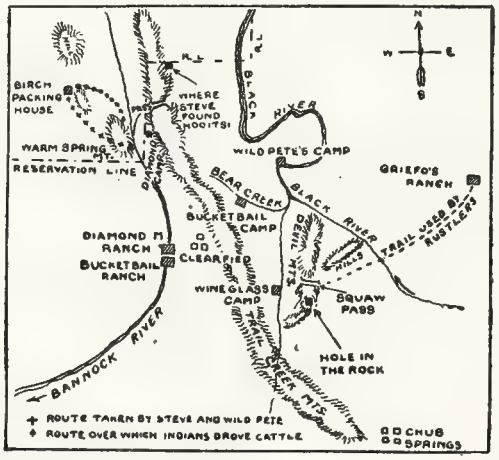
On its slopes, plainly visible, were thousands of Diamond M and Bucketbail cattle luxuriating in dry bunch-grass up to their knees, and the short, green grass just springing up around the roots of the dry. The range was ideal, and the cattle could not be doing better.

Eutsler's eyes roamed to the other side of the divide, his own range, and he frowned. Here were no warm springs, and where the snow was off, the grass lay flat to the ground, moldy, of a whitish color, tasteless, and without nourishment. On the faraway hills east of Devil Creek, and on the bottoms along the Blacksnake that were visible he could discern numerous black specks which he knew were Wineglass cattle. Somewhere to the north, he knew, was the Summer herd of dogeys belonging to farmers in the Great Snake valley, and under the control of Wild Pete.

In spite of the fact that the cattle were doing so much better on the reservation than they would off, Eutsler determined to move them. There was always the prospect of more or less disastrous trouble with the Indians, but the thing that impelled him most was the fear of encroachment by the Wineglass outfit or Wild Pete.

The rightful range of the Diamond M and Bucketbail outfits extended from just north of the Trail Creek divide on the west, to the reservation line on the north to where it struck the Blacksnake River. Thence it followed the river to its junction with Devil Creek, itself a small river, thence up Devil Creek to a tributary called Bear Creek, which in turn headed in the high range of hills just east of Clearfield and the Diamond M ranch. This line of hills, the divide between the Blacksnake and Bannock Rivers, ran clear to Chub Springs, and was broken only by a few passes of which the one on Trail Creek was the most used.

It was the pick of the range, but was on the whole, later than the surrounding



range—a circumstance which had been neutralized by using the reservation to turn out upon. Notwithstanding this lateness, however, the Wineglass foreman was asking for the use of it on the pretext, and Eutsler was convinced it was nothing else, that there was not sufficient feed on his own range. There was a measure of defense for Wild Pete, for that man, with his pariah of an outfit, had to squeeze in where he could.

For all Eutsler knew Metcalf might even now have thousands of head of cattle on the near side of Bear Creek. Fink, with his Bucketbail riders, were supposed to ride that end of the range, but as the cattle were still on the reservation Eutsler knew they had not been near it.

"Brig," Eutsler said suddenly, turning to one of his riders, "ride down to the ranch an' help Steve Malty bring out the hospital

bunch. Me and Bob will start pushin' the cattle off of the reservation."

"All right," the rider called Brig said obediently.

He and his brother, Heb, who had been left at camp to wash up the breakfast dishes, were the other two riders of the Diamond M. They were Mormon lads from the settlement at Clearfield, and though they did their work well they were completely lacking in aggressiveness.

"Wait a minute," Eutsler commanded. "Here comes Fink—just the man I want to see."

A moment later Fink, and his inseparable companion, Bill Cummins, rode up.

"Glad you showed up, Fink," Eutsler greeted. "I was just goin' to commence movin' the cattle off the reservation."

"No hurry about that. They're doin' all right," Fink observed.

"But there's danger," Eutsler argued.

He began a statement of his reasons for wanting to move, but Fink cut him off.

"You're a regular old woman, Eutsler—always scared of somethin'. Them cattle ought to stay where they're at for the next three weeks."

"Old woman or not, I'm goin' to have my way once in a while. I'll tell you straight, Fink, I don't like this mixed outfit an' divided authority business; but this is my end of the range, an' I'm goin' to move those cattle," Eutsler announced firmly.

"Well, you can't move 'em onto my end of the range because I told the Wineglass outfit they could use our range for a couple of weeks."

Fink toyed with his quirt and grinned maliciously at the other foreman.

"You told Metcalf he could have our range?" Eutsler demanded, making no effort to hide the consternation into which Fink's statement had thrown him.

"I told Ortega, which amounts to the same thing as he's runnin' the outfit, while Metcalf is in the hospital recoverin' from the effects of his rumpus with Wild Pete. We don't need it. We've got better range than anybody without it, an' there's no use actin' the hog."

"You're gittin' purty —— liberal with our range—" Eutsler began hotly, only to stop with open mouth.

Out of the brush on both sides of the trail Indian riders were pouring, their faces black and ominous.

Fink and Cummins, suddenly turning pale, reached nervously for their guns.

"Stop it, you fools," Eutsler hissed. "You'll git us all killed."

Fink quickly recovered his self-possession and let his gun slip back. The obtuse Cummins, however, persisted in lugging his six-shooter into the daylight. Bob Logan seized the man's wrist in a grip of steel and forced the gun out of sight.

"Put it up," Bob commanded, but the fellow struggled in a frenzy of fear until Fink ordered him to be quiet. Then he obeyed dumbly.

There were fully fifty Indians in the band, led by Hogitsi the war chief, a powerful buck on a pinto pony. He uttered a word of command and a dozen Indians dismounted and advanced toward the white men. With an imperious gesture Hogitsi ordered the white men to get off their horses.

"Better not resist 'em any," Jack Eutsler counseled. "We can straighten it out at the Agency."

The Indians on foot promptly took the white men's guns, and then proceeded to tie their hands behind their backs until the ropes cut into the flesh.

"See here, Hogitsi, you'd better listen to a talk. You mebbe ketch-um heap trouble," Eutsler warned.

The other Indians laughed at the joke, but the war chief remained unsmiling.

"Your cattle?" he asked sternly, pointing at the cattle ranging on Warm Spring Mountain.

"Yep," Eutsler confessed.

"Your reservation?" Hogitsi persisted grimly.

"No; it's yours," Eutsler was forced to admit.

"Ugh," grunted the war chief in a way that made it plain there was no more to be said.

Two Indians led each cowboy to a bony specimen of horseflesh which had undoubtedly been brought along for a specific purpose. Each man was lifted to the back of one of these ponies, then had his feet tied together firmly under the pony's belly in such a way that it was impossible to move to get any relaxation. Having their hands tied behind their backs caused them to feel acute discomfort even before the horses began to move.

"They'll take us clear to the agency, an' it's all of twenty-five miles. We'll be wrecks

when we git there," Fred Fink groaned.

This surmise, painful as it was, soon proved to be entirely too optimistic. For the Indians, instead of taking their prisoners direct to the agency, began rounding up the cattle, and the horses the prisoners were on were led back and forth behind the cattle at a bone-bruising jog-trot.

To the physical pain was added not only worry as to the ultimate outcome, but for Eutsler at least, a mental anxiety as to what the Indians intended to do with the cattle. Snowdrifts had kept the cattle in a compact body, almost as though they were herded, and it was not difficult for the Indians to round them up and get them to moving. But instead of driving them off of the reservation they were driving them straight into the heart of it, straight toward Barry's pass on the divide that separated the Bannock slope from the Great Snake slope where the bulk of the reservation lay.

Eutsler knew that Hogitsi would not be so foolish as to try to drive the cattle to the Agency, and so risk the displeasure of the superintendent. Undoubtedly he planned a more sinister revenge. The foreman shuddered when he thought of the wild, cañon-cut country that lay just on the other side of the pass.

CHAPTER V

THE BIRCH PACKING HOUSE

WHEN young Heb Cross finished washing up the breakfast dishes he methodically hung all the bedding in camp out to air on the bushes. Then he looked around for other material upon which to exercise his housekeeping instinct; but finding none he reluctantly saddled the horse which had been left tied to the rope corral for his benefit.

Being the youngest member of the outfit it usually devolved upon him to do the cooking, cleaning up of the camp, and any other odd chores that needed doing. Quite frequently he escaped throughout a whole day without having to straddle a horse. This day, however, Eutsler had given him orders to saddle up and follow when he got the work done.

So, by being more than usually leisurely—for he scented a hard day's riding ahead—Heb managed to arrive at the top of the divide just after the Indians had vacated it with their prisoners. The boy's mouth gaped open in astonishment at the strange sight he saw of buck Indians riding his friends' horses, and those friends astride the saddest of Indian cayuses tied hand and foot.

But Heb, though of gentle disposition, was not slow witted. Like a flash he ducked into the timber and reined his horse back down the hill. Then as rapidly as he could, he made his way through the timber, eventually coming out on top of the divide two miles south. A look around convinced him that there were no Indians present, so he angled down off the side-hill and broke into a gallop when he reached the bottom, splitting the wind for the Diamond M ranch.

Just inside the first ranch pasture he came to, he saw some cattle grazing which he recognized as being the hospital bunch. A little farther on he saw a man driving some calves. After a moment's hesitation he changed his course and headed for this rider. The man was a stranger to Heb, but the boy guessed that he was the other cowboy Eutsler had hired.

"Say, you ridin' fer the Diamon' M?" he asked to make sure.

"Yes—what's your hurry?" Steve said.

Breathlessly the boy tumbled out the story of what he had seen.

"Say," he finished, "you go to the ranch an' let Mrs. Gibbs an' Jennie know, an' I'll go to Clearfield an' tell Bishop Compton—he'll know what to do better than anybody else."

Like the average Mormon youth his first instinct in time of trouble was to seek the advice of his bishop.

"Hold on there," Steve arrested him curtly. "This is a man's job by the looks of things, an' there ain't no use in worryin' them women about it yet even if it is their outfit. An' as fur as that goes I don't see no necessity of ringin' in the Mormon church on the deal. You an' me are goin' back an' see what we can do."

Heb gazed at him blankly for a moment, then turned defiant.

"What could two men do against all them Injuns?" he asked reasonably. "It's up to you to tell them women because I'm not goin' to waste any more time. I'm goin' to see Bishop Compton."

Steve quickly saw that it would be useless to argue with the fanaticism of the boy, or rather with his blind faith in the power of his bishop.

"All right," he relented, "go on an' see your bishop, an' tell him what you darn please, but don't bother the Gibbs women."

Actually, Steve had no idea of the real gravity of the situation. That the Indians might do something really serious did not occur to him. His chief anxiety was that his partner, Bob Logan, might be in trouble. Then his innate cowboy loyalty required that he get in the thick of things at once if his outfit was in trouble.

He was riding Sitting Bull, and he swung the powerful black outlaw about and let him out up the trail at a fast, swinging trot toward the reservation. The road was strange to Steve, but he had a pretty clear idea that if he followed the river he would sooner or later come into contact with the cattle, and from there he should be able to figure out the lay of the land. A few miles up-stream he came to the narrows, where a long high ridge ran out from Warm Spring Mountain to almost touch a similar ridge, running from the hills on the other side. Between them the water piled high in a foamy cascade.

Steve turned his horse from the road at this point and angled up the ridge on the western side of the river at a fast walk. His idea was to get a look at the surrounding country, and perhaps see some signs of the cattle, or the Indians and cowboys.

He emitted a surprized whistle when he topped the ridge a few minutes later. He could plainly see the great bunch of cattle several miles away, with the horde of Indians urging them on. Though unfamiliar with the range he knew the cattle were being driven in the wrong direction. To save him he could think of no way by which he alone could outwit fifty Indians.

He was aroused from his problem by a yell that sounded not unlike the bellow of an enraged bull. Looking around he saw a man on the ridge that formed the opposite bank of the river. Even at that distance he recognized the man by his huge bulk as the man called Wild Pete—the fellow he had saved from death in the Salt Lake saloon in Chub Springs by shooting out the lights.

"Come over here," Steve yelled, waving his hat.

He doubted that his voice would carry, but the hat signal should be enough.

"Whoooo-o-o-p-e-e," he heard the giant roar. The Dane waved his hat in answering signal, then came tearing down the ridge at a break-neck speed, straight toward the narrows.

Steve had not noticed a ford at that point, so rode along the top of the ridge to the break-off to see where the man crossed. He knew reckless riding when he saw it and was thrilled with admiration as he watched the maniacal ride of the Dane—for Wild Pete showed no unusual skill. He rode with pure deviltry, solely upon his nerve.

Without slackening speed he spurred his horse straight to the high river bank. With a long, desperate leap the horse sprang far out and landed in the current. Horse and rider were completely submerged, but when they came up the horse struck out gamely for the bank, while its rider shook the water from his great yellow beard, and roared with laughter—almost insane laughter it seemed to Steve.

A moment later the horse struggled up the bank, and Wild Pete, without waiting for the horse to get its breath, urged it up the ridge with quirt and spurs until they reached Steve. There the horse dropped its head and wheezed brokenly.

Steve regarded the man with hot displeasure.

"Don't you know you'll kill that horse, ridin' him that way?" he demanded, forgetting for the moment his own business in the natural rage of a horse lover when he sees one abused.

"I've killed hundreds of horses before this, an' I expect to kill hundreds more before I die. That's what they're made for," the giant laughed.

"Them sentiments don't make a hit with me," Steve said icily.

"Mebbe not, but for me horseflesh is cheaper than men. I'm a lone wolf, an' I ain't got but one friend in the world—that's the Injun kid that lives with me. By ridin' three times as much as other men I can run my outfit without help, but it takes horses," Wild Pete explained.

"A man that ain't a friend to a horse is no friend to me," Steve said angrily.

Contrary to Steve's expectations, the Dane laughed again.

"You're the kid that helped me git clear of the Wineglassers down at Chub Springs a few evenin's ago, ain't you?" he asked.

"I put out the lights," Steve acknowledged.

"I thought it was you. What're you doin' now?"

"I'm ridin' for the Diamond M," Steve informed bruskly.

"So? I come over to see your boss this mornin' but he wasn't to camp. Good feller, Eutsler, but he ain't got the guts of a louse. But I been wonderin' what's the meanin' of all them cattle headed toward the Agency?"

Crisply Steve repeated what Heb Cross had told him.

"Know what them Injuns is up to with them cattle?" the Dane demanded quizzically.

"I can't figure it out," Steve admitted.

"Don't you know what's just on the other side of the divide from where they're takin' 'em?"

"No, I don't," Steve said impatiently. "I don't know this range."

"That's different," Wild Pete admitted. "Well then, I'll tell you. There's a deep, narrow cañon just on the other side with a creek runnin' through it which has cut out a deep channel. About ten years ago a bunch of drunken cowpunchers sent two hundred head of beef steers down the side of that cañon on the run, an' when they hit the creek the leaders couldn't git out of the birches at the bottom an' the whole bunch piled up an' smothered. They've called it the Birch Packin' House ever since."

"Good ——!" Steve ejaculated. "Then those Injuns figure on stampedin' that bunch in the same way?"

"It's a deep cañon—I reckon there's room for a good many thousand head," Wild Pete said laconically.

"Ain't there no way we can stop it?" Steve choked.

The cowboy soul of him was torn by this supreme disaster.

"Well," Wild Pete began in a tone of mock judiciousness, "if you wasn't so scrupulous about hurtin' horses we might make it by runnin' up the top of this ridge to the head of it, an' droppin' into the cañon farther up. Them cattle are movin' slow, an' we can cut off quite a chunk of distance. But of course we'd have to ride faster than a walk, an' that wouldn't do a-tall."

"Let's be movin'," Steve said curtly. "It's better to kill a couple of horses than five or six thousand head of cattle."

The Dane let out another bellow, grabbed his horse with the spurs, and was off up the mountain on a dead run. Steve followed for a quarter of a mile, then seeing that the other man would have no mercy upon his horse, and not caring to see the beast's pitiful efforts under punishment, he took the lead. Sitting Bull was fresh, and was a far better horse than the other at any time. Besides having the advantage of weight, Steve knew how to conserve the very last ounce of energy in a horse. For once, he determined grimly, the wild man would have to eat dust.

Though Sitting Bull was climbing the mountain like a bull elk the other horse was coming on gamely. Steve could hear the heartrending efforts of the horse to get his wind, and the pitiful sound brought sobs of mingled anger, pity and helplessness to his own throat.

"Quit, your horse can't make it, an' there's no use in killin' him," he yelled back at the Dane.

"Wait," bellowed the Dane. "Wait a minute."

"I ain't got time to wait," Steve tossed back over his shoulder.

"You've got to," Wild Pete shouted. "Listen: My horse can't make it. You've got to let me have your horse."

"Nothin' doin'," Steve called back.

"Wait," the Dane was pleading now, "you can't do nothin' when you do git there. To git there in time you'll have to ride like —— down the side of a mountain where no man but me dares to run a horse. There's a chaparral jungle at the top, and cliffs an' ledges of rock all the way down, an' badger holes thicker'n the lice in an Injun's hair. When you see it you'll just curl up an' die. Honest, I'm the only man that dares to ride down there faster'n a walk, an' I'm crazy or I couldn't do it."

Steve's only answer was an impudent laugh, and a touch of the spurs to Sitting Bull's flanks. Soon the Dane was beyond earshot. At length Steve gained the top of the divide and looked ahead. His heart quickened when he took in the situation in its fullness.

The Birch Packing House was all that its name implied, and more. Already the cattle were on the flat of the divide, the leaders surging nervously above the death-trap, while the yelling, blanket-waving Indians rushed back and forth behind them trying to get the stampede in motion.

Steve gave a glance at the mountain side he had to traverse before he could reach the cattle. Wild Pete had not exaggerated its roughness in the least. It was a steep

quarter of a mile slope, with a perfect network of holes where a fall meant almost certainly a broken neck for either horse or rider.

Sitting Bull's flanks were heaving, but Steve knew that his wind was not permanently injured, and that he was good for a long run now that the severe strain of climbing was over. He had no time to hunt for a trail through the chaparral so he spurred the horse into its mess of tangle. By sheer strength Sitting Bull plunged through it without once getting his feet caught. Then Steve slapped him on the neck, touched him with the spurs, and they were away down the hill at racing speed. Steve sat his saddle loosely, occasionally throwing his weight now this way, now that, to help the horse through the badger holes or over the rocks, but all the time maintaining a perfect balance.

Only a few of the Indians—those who were guarding the prisoners—and the prisoners themselves, saw the wild ride until Steve had made a contact with the now thoroughly frightened cattle. By that time it was too late for any of the Indians to try to stop him.

Waving his slicker, and yelling at the top of his voice, he struck in just ahead of the herd. The cattle veered away from him to the right, but he continued in front of them, crowding in close, hoping to turn the entire front down the long way of the ridge. A fall in front of the herd meant death, a matter to which Steve gave not a passing thought, being entirely engrossed in the work at hand.

By the time he had crossed the front of the herd he had turned all the leaders to the right, but he had been himself forced to the bank of the creek. Spinning Sitting Bull around he raced back up the creek in a desperate hope of doing more, but he quickly saw that he had done all that was possible.

The herd was making frantic efforts to turn and follow the leaders, loosening tons of gravel as they did so. But each one that turned on the outside was forced relentlessly closer to the creek, and some of them were hurled into the canyon. Steve forced Sitting Bull as far into the birches as possible and waited.

Gradually the great herd straightened out and swept on down the ridge parallel to the creek, so close that some of them were thrown in and killed; but the total loss was not more than fifty. The plan of Hogitsi had failed.

When the last frightened animal thundered by Steve rode his trembling horse out of the brush. Half a dozen reckless Indians were hard on their heels and surrounded the cowboy. Steve perceived that it would be folly to resist so he accompanied them quietly back to the top of the ridge where Hogitsi, the prisoners, and the rest of the Indians waited. He saw that it was a serious situation, but he was too jubilant over his victory in saving the cattle to take it that way.

"Got slipped up on, didn't you, old top?" he asked Hogitsi impudently.

The war chief had been one of the leaders of the Indians who had terrorized southern Idaho and northern Utah a few brief years before, and had acquired a fondness for the shedding of white blood. He was boiling with wrath, and red murder lurked in his beady eyes.

"Mebbe so we see who win," he declared angrily.

Steve allowed his eyes to play over the mob coolly. It did not require the dejected look on the face of Bob Logan to tell him the danger of his position, but he could not help getting a little sinister enjoyment out of being the center of the stage.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a young Indian who was furtively making signs to him. Steve recognized him as War-Jack, the young Indian whose horse he had recovered from Fink. With quick comprehension he grasped what the young buck was trying to convey. He raised the spotted cow's tail that adorned his saddle and shook it defiantly at Hogitsi.

"You see my medicine?" he demanded imperiously.

A startled chorus of grunts arose from the Indians. Hogitsi rode closer and examined the medicine string.

"Where you ketchum medicine string?" he said sternly.

"My friend—Chief Kebro—he give me this medicine," he explained.

Then, as an afterthought—

"It is strong medicine or I couldn't have turned those cattle."

The Indians were visibly impressed, with the exception of Hogitsi.

"You stealum Kebro medicine. That why Kebro heap sick," he charged.

Indian sentiment promptly veered away

from Steve. It was War-Jack who saved the situation. He began to speak rapidly in the native tongue. The Indians were at first surprized, and then some of them began to look at Steve with positive admiration. Hogitsi attempted to shut the young buck up, but some of the older men interfered. Soon there was a heated argument in full progress, and Steve began to grin. He understood that with Indians, no less than white men, family quarrels assuredly meant aid and comfort to the enemy.

Suddenly, with an angry gesture, Hogitsi drew a knife and rode toward the prisoners. Bill Cummins, who happened to be first in line, emitted a squawk of terror. Hogitsi grunted disdainfully and slashed the rope that bound the man's hands, repeating the operation on the others. Then he threw a word of command to another Indian, who dismounted and cut the prisoners' feet loose, allowing them to roll off their horses onto the ground.

Having scored an anti-climax the war chief was determined to get a childish revenge on his followers by liberating the prisoners. With a few of his friends he rode stolidly away.

Hogitsi was plainly more vindictive than the rest of the Indians, but it was evident that the ones who remained were undecided what to do with the prisoners and the cattle. They talked among themselves for some time, and then War-Jack addressed the whites in very good English.

"Two boss come along to Agency—see agent. Rest of you gather up cattle—take-um off reservation," he said, indicating that the five who had had their horses taken were to have them back.

They climbed stiffly into their own saddles with grateful sighs of relief.

"Git these cattle off this —— reservation as quick as ——'ll let you. I don't want to see even a cow-track here when I git back," Jack Eutsler told them.

There came an interruption, a snorting and the sound of cracking bushes, and Wild Pete, carrying his riding paraphernalia, burst out of the brush.

"I killed my horse, but I got to the top in time to see you turn them cattle," he informed Steve, with unfeigned admiration. "Boy, you're a man after my own heart. When it comes to ridin' there ain't nothin' can touch us."

It took the giant but a few minutes to buy a pony from War-Jack, and he turned in to help the riders gather up the cattle again after the Indians had left with the two foremen.

Steve dropped in beside his partner, who was riding his stirrups as much as possible.

"Did they hurt you much, Bob?" he asked gently.

"Hurt me?" Bob muttered bitterly. "I hope you're satisfied with this range at last," he went on. "Nothin' would do you but some place where there was lots of excitement. Have you had it, you long-eared descendant of Balaam's ass? Are you plumb contented now that you've dragged us into this —— forsaken hole, where even the ducks blindfold themselves before they'll fly over it?

"Say," he broke out with renewed bitterness, "if you had brains enough to comprehend a fraction of your own misery you'd crawl into one of these badger holes an' die. But you ain't. If all the brains of you and your descendants, and your ancestors was rolled up into a ball it wouldn't be big enough to make a foot-stool for a wood tick."

Steve grinned.

"Now that you've got it off your system you ought to git better real fast," he declared.

CHAPTER VI

STEVE MAKES THREE RESOLUTIONS

WHEN at last the cattle were checked and worked back up to the top of the divide, Steve, having due consideration for the suffering the other riders had undergone, volunteered to edge them down alone. The three cowboys who had been punished by the Indians were in no condition to ride. To Steve's surprize Wild Pete insisted upon staying with him.

"My Injun kid, Charley, will look after my outfit all right until tomorrow," the Dane said. "Somebody will have to night-herd here to keep these cattle from straglin', an' to keep the Injuns from havin' any more fun with 'em, so I'll stay an' help you do it."

"Glad to have you," Steve said cordially.

He was well pleased that he seemed to have made a hit with the big Dane, for the way things were beginning to break he realized that he was making more enemies than he could very well handle, and Wild Pete,

despite his very evident faults, would be a powerful help in an emergency.

"If Heb gits back from interviewin' his bishop today, send him out to us with a lunch, an' a couple of fresh horses," Steve requested.

"All right—we'll be on hand in the mornin' if we're still alive," Bob promised, as he and Brig rode slowly away.

Bill Cummins had slipped away long before.

Steve and Pete worked the herd slowly down toward the lower levels, a real job for only two riders. Their aim was to hold the bunch together as much as possible, and keep them feeding toward the ford across the Bannock at the junction with Trail Creek, so that they could be shoved off of the reservation and over the Trail Creek divide the next day.

Although Steve was automatically registering, and filing away in his brain all the topography of the range, and the various landmarks as he rode back and forth behind the cattle, his real thoughts were far away. Or rather they centered about and upon Jennie Gibbs. Steve's intentions regarding the girl when he first met her were rather nebulous, but they had soon crystallized into a definite determination to win her if it were humanly possible to do so.

His easy victory over Fred Fink, who, so far as he knew at the time, was his only rival, had heartened him immensely. Then, too, he had gone far on the road to friendliness with Jennie during the four or five days he had been at the ranch. But this very progress made him doubt that he was making any real impression in the way he would like. His common sense told him that her increasing friendliness was due more to her innate comradely spirit than to his own attractiveness.

But having fallen in love with characteristic impetuosity he set out to play the game for all it was worth. Unthinking he was at times, and given to a rather high estimate of his own prowess; but he never bluffed until he was absolutely sure of his ability to make good, and once committed to any cause he gave to it unreservedly every particle of his energy and ability.

His mind swung to the more practical phases of the question. In the few days that he had lived on the ranch he had observed that Jennie was the real business head; her mother, splendid woman that she was, had been too long circumscribed by the routine duties of housekeeping to be able to rise to the responsibilities of running a cattle outfit. But the thing which bothered him most was whether Jennie herself was equal to the situation.

He had been raised in a country and in a generation where woman's work was strictly defined, and it was supposed to be the duty of man to keep her unspotted from the sordid business of making a living. His practical experience, however, had taught him that as a matter of fact there were many specimens of the *genus homo* as ready to prey upon the weakness of women as of men.

Suddenly Steve became scared—scared stiff. He thought of the long chain of circumstances which had enabled him to save the Diamond M cattle by a hair's-breadth. If any one of a dozen different things had happened differently, at that moment Jennie and her mother would have been paupers. Mrs. Gibbs had unreservedly confided to him that everything they owned was mortgaged up to the handle. He actually trembled with the weakness of fear, but it also served to make him think more seriously than he was in the habit of doing.

The present mess had been due to the lack of a capable man on the ranch. Steve knew that Jennie had sent word to Fink that the Indians meant to make trouble, so either Fink or Eutsler was to blame for the scrape. As to Fink, Steve was avowedly puzzled as to what kind of game the man was playing. He was sure of but one thing regarding him—that he was not on the square.

Eutsler was not hard to read. Undoubtedly he was devoted to the interests of the Diamond M, and was an efficient man so long as everything went well; but he was not, Steve decided, a man of sufficient initiative to solve successfully such problems as seemed to confront the Diamond M. Then, too, Eutsler was taking in too much territory in trying to run both the cattle outfit and the ranch.

This reflection caused him to remember Eutsler's expressed desire to find a capable cattle boss so that he could devote all his attention to the ranch. That instant Steve determined to get that job. As cattle boss he would have much firmer footing, and a better chance with Jennie—and the job appealed to him for its own sake.

He was recalled to his immediate surroundings by seeing Heb Cross riding toward him.

"Where's the rescue party you went after?" Steve asked, jeeringly.

"I—I guess I was a little too much excited," Heb confessed shamefacedly. "The bishop told me the Injuns wouldn't do anythin' serious, so I come back."

"Oh, he told you that, did he? That the Injuns was plumb harmless, huh?" Steve asked ironically.

Heb failed to notice the veiled meaning.

"Is Brig at camp?" he inquired.

"Yes, he's at camp," Steve acknowledged. "Now you hustle there yourself, an' fetch back a lunch, an' a change of horses for me an' Pete."

"Say," Heb exclaimed with sudden heat, "ain't you presumin' a whole lot for a man that's only been workin' for the outfit a week when you begin givin' orders to a man that's worked here for two years?"

"Somebody's got to give you orders," Steve said mildly. "If nobody else does it you have to run to the bishop to git him to. So hump yourself an' do like I tell you."

The Mormon boy sized him up with increasing perplexity. Still wondering whether or not to stand on his dignity he rode away.

Before dark Heb was back with the lunch and the fresh horses. Steve and the Dane shifted their saddles to the fresh horses, and dismissed Heb with the tired ones. Then they attacked the huge pile of bread and cold beefsteaks with avidity. When the last crum had disappeared the Dane spoke.

"See here, young feller," he said, "I'm goin' to make you a proposition I never made to a man before. You know I run a Summer herd, stuff that belongs to a lot of little farmers. They pay me a dollar a month a head, an' I insure 'em the count. Because I'm a ridin' fool I don't lose many, an' I make ten times as much as I would workin' for wages. If I had a man with me with as much nerve as I've got I could handle twice as many. You're the first man I've ever met that seemed to fill the bill. I'll take you into partnership with me and guarantee you two hundred dollars a month. What say?"

"I'll have to think it over," Steve said slowly. "I'll let you know in the mornin'."

"If you're thinkin' about that partner of yours, I'll tell you what you can do. You can take him in with you on any kind of an agreement you like, just so you an' me is the firm. I've got my Injun kid, an' you can have him. Even if you give him an even whack of your share you'll beat wages all to ——."

"Don't you have trouble with rustlers?" Steve asked, still non-committal on the main proposition. "It looks to me like runnin' all them different brands would be a regular invitation to rustlers."

"It is. They're always tryin' to pull somethin'; but since I caught a couple of Wineglass riders tryin' to tamper with my calves, an' tied 'em up to a tree an' hoss-whipped 'em with a quirt they're more careful," the Dane said grimly.

Steve studied the giant with amazed eyes. From what he had seen of the big fellow it had never occurred to him that he would hesitate to take a life when he was angry. Yet here in a country where rustling was uniformly punishable with death, he had turned loose two rustlers with only a whipping. Two rattlesnakes undoubtedly, whoever they were, who were only waiting out a chance for revenge. Certainly it would have been as easy for him to hang them as to whip them once they were his prisoners. The man was queer.

"Ain't they never tried to git you?" Steve asked.

"Oh, they pester about some," the Dane replied easily, as he started for his horse, "but I've come out ahead so far. Of course I never sleep twice in the same place, an' never stand close to a fire after dark, an' never foller a trail when I ride through the timber, an' in general take little precautions like that."

"Fascinatin' existence to be sure," Steve chuckled. "I'll have to think that proposition over."

To one of Steve's temperament the idea of joining the Dane's precarious outfit was delightfully attractive, without the added incentive of much more money. Had it been made before he had met Jennie Gibbs he would have jumped at the bait with mouth wide open. As he jogged around the nervous cattle in the semi-darkness he turned the matter over and over in his mind.

Even if he succeeded in his newly formed ambition to become foreman of the Diamond M the job would not pay more than seventy-five dollars a month. Also, there was still another factor to be considered.

Steve had come into the country with Bob Logan. Bob was his partner, and as such had first claim on his loyalty. Before his loyalty to his outfit, before his love for the girl, his strange cowboy code of honor demanded that he stick to his partner.

If he accepted Wild Pete's offer it would increase Bob's earnings at least two and one half times, and the only chance for Bob to get it was through Steve. It seemed clear to him that he should take the Dane up on his proposition—yet he could not quite bring himself to make the mental declaration that would sever his relation with the Diamond M. Morning found him still undecided.

Shortly after sunrise Bob and Brig appeared. Bob's visage was sober, and the Mormon boy's plainly excited.

"Didn't you fetch us no breakfast?" Steve demanded indignantly, when the two were within hearing.

"I told Heb to have a hot breakfast for you; we'll watch the cattle while you eat," Bob said with the manner of having more weighty things on his mind. "When you git through you might ride up on top of the divide an' cast your eye around for a place to put these said cattle."

Bob's dejected aspect alarmed Steve.

"Have you been up there this mornin'?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, I was up there at daylight lookin' for the cavy."

"What's up?" Steve asked sharply.

"Nothin'—only the whole country is black with Wineglass cattle," Bob replied.

"On the Diamond M range?"

"On what's been pointed out to me as the Diamond M and Bucketbail range."

"When did all that happen?" Steve inquired, his jaws beginning to set.

"They must have whooped their whole bunch over there yesterday while the Injuns was havin' fun with us," Bob answered.

"Then it's up to us to whoop 'em off," Steve said grimly.

"Say, fellers," Brig piped up, "we can't chase 'em off because I heard Fred Fink tell Eutsler yesterday that he'd told the Wineglass outfit they could turn on our range fer a couple of weeks. You heard him, Bob."

Bob nodded gloomy affirmation.

"What kind of a corrupted outfit is this?" Steve wondered.

"It's the kind that furnishes the excitement you been lookin' for, me boy," Bob said sarcastically.

"What are we goin' to do?" Brig queried, glorying in their helplessness. "We've got to git 'em off the reservation today, an' there's no place to go. The boss is probably in jail, an'—by golly, I'm goin' to see the bishop."

Before any one could interfere he was off down the road to Clearfield in a swirl of dust.

"Fine, strong outfit, this, to fight a tribe of Injuns, the biggest cow outfit in the country, and a lot of rustlers," Bob stated with fine sarcasm.

"You fellers had better take my offer?" Wild Pete addressed Steve.

"I've decided that I can't go in with you, Pete; but I'm much obliged just the same," Steve said, throwing out his rope and lassoing a small bush to avoid meeting the other men's eyes.

Then turning to Bob he said quietly—

"It don't make one —— bit of difference what sort of an outfit it is, Bobby, it's goin' to fight 'em all to a standstill if you an' me have to do it alone."

CHAPTER VII

MURDER—AND A BLOOD-STAINED ROPE

"AIN'T you goin' to stop for breakfast?" Steve queried in surprize, as Wild Pete, who had acted strangely ever since hearing of the presence of the Wineglass cattle, made no signs of turning off toward the cold spring a short distance from Trail creek where the Diamond M camp was located.

"Think not," the Dane said shortly.

"What's wrong?" Steve demanded.

"My cattle are on this side of the Blacksnake, in the big bend of the river down next to the reservation. If the Wineglassers have been there I'm curious to know what's happened."

"Let's eat, an' I'll go with you," Steve offered.

"I'll not stop," Wild Pete refused again.

"Let's change horses anyway," Steve suggested.

"What's horseflesh?" the giant sneered.

"All right, I can stand it if you can, an' if you think there is somethin' wrong I'm goin' with you," Steve said.

They rode on up the trail to the top of the

divide, while Heb, with growing irritation, watched his coffee and beefsteaks grow stale.

From the top of the divide they saw thousands of cattle, the great herd extending without a break into the big bend where Wild Pete had left his cattle. More ominous than the presence of the cattle was the total absence of men.

"Somethin's happened to Charley—he never would have let them cattle in there," Wild Pete exclaimed in a tense whisper.

Steve noted that the big man showed signs of almost womanly alarm.

"Let's hit the trail down there," Steve suggested.

"Hit the trail nothin'," shouted Wild Pete, regaining his accustomed roar. "If there's been trouble down there we don't want to be picked off by some dude waitin' behind a tree for us to come siftin' down the trail."

They headed straight into the thick quaking aspens which covered the hillside, breaking through them at a fast run. Again Steve got an example of the Dane's reckless riding. Although he tore great limbs off the trees as he struck them, and others slashed him wickedly across the face until the blood trickled down over his great yellow beard he never ceased to spur. Each time he received a harder lick than usual he let out a roar.

Steve became convinced that the man was unbalanced, in some respects at least. But pride would not permit him to lag behind. He stayed breast to breast with the giant, taking the wallops from the brush with a grin, well pleased that his slenderer build, and greater activity permitted him to dodge about nine tenths of the bruises which the Dane was forced to take.

They broke into the open, and Wild Pete let out a whoop which caused the cattle for a half-mile around to throw up their tails and run for their lives. Straight towards the bend of the river they dashed as fast as their horses could run. They had just reached a point where the river began to sag out in the beginning of a loop when Steve's horse snorted and jumped violently sideways. With cowboy instinct Steve looked to see what had frightened the horse before he was again firmly settled in the saddle.

"Whoa," he called loudly. "This your Injun?"

Wild Pete wheeled his horse around and rode back. A huddled heap of blood and rags lay with neck under body where it had been dragged violently against a greasewood. With a bitter moan the Dane hurled himself from the saddle and gathered the gruesome object in his arms. Steve could see that it was the body of an Indian boy of perhaps sixteen.

Wild Pete knelt over the body, and hoarse, dry sobs racked his giant frame. Steve turned away and surveyed the landscape with eyes blurred with tears of quick sympathy for the stricken giant.

At last the Dane controlled himself and arose. In his eyes was a look which convinced Steve that if he was not crazy before he stood on the brink of becoming so now.

"They roped him an' drug him to death like they would a varmint, the ——," he snarled, his teeth showing beast-like through the heavy tangle of beard.

Steve dismounted and examined the Indian boy carefully. There was not a wound on him except such as had been received from being dragged by the rope. Steve's heart pounded with a cold rage. Accustomed as he was to scenes of violence, coupled with more or less brutality, he could scarcely comprehend the sheer cold-bloodedness of such a murder.

He stooped over and examined the boy's throat where the rope had rubbed. It was black and burned, but there was a rawer welt where the rope had finally tightened and stayed until taken off by the murderer. It seemed to him that the rope must have been smaller-sized than the usual hemp one in common use. Closer inspection disclosed a small number of fibers from the rope that had become stuck into the boy's flesh like slivers.

Gingerly Steve pulled a few of these out and at once discovered that they were horsehair. It was not hard to deduce that the murderer had used a small, tightly braided horsehair rope—and horsehair ropes were decidedly uncommon.

Steve was about to make known his discovery to Wild Pete, but prudently decided to wait. Undoubtedly the Dane would attempt to kill with his hands the first man he found with such a rope without giving him any chance to prove an alibi. Steve decided to keep quiet for the present, and to keep a keen lookout for horsehair ropes among the Wineglass outfit.

"Did the kid belong on this reservation?"

Steve asked in a feeble attempt to show his sympathy.

The Dane laid the boy tenderly on the grass, and began to speak in a voice softer than Steve had ever heard him use. In fact it was almost in a reminiscent tone as though he wished to call up the dead past more on his own account than to enlighten Steve.

"No," he began gently. "Ten years ago I found him where he had been lost from his people. He was just a little bit of a shaver, and the only clothes he had on was an old ragged sheepskin. I gathered from what he said afterward that his people were Lemhis, or Sheep-Eaters, as the other Injuns called 'em, an' that they had got into a rumpus with a band of Flatheads and had been killed off. This little cuss run off in the brush to hide an' everybody went away an' left him.

"When I found him he was wilder than a coyote, an' I had to rope him to git to clean him up an' feed him. If he'd been a white kid lots of people would have been glad to have took him to raise, but bein' an Injun nobody wanted him except an old stiff that just wanted him so's he could work the tar out of him.

"When I was goin' to leave him there the little cuss grabbed me around the legs, an' without sayin' a word begged me not to let him go. So I kept him, an' there wasn't nothin' he wouldn't have done for me. But now he's——"

Again the big fellow's voice broke and to control himself he had to bite his lip until the blood ran.

"When I find the man that put that rope on Charley I'll give him a death that will make Charley's seem like a bed of ease in comparison. Are you a friend of mine?" he demanded of Steve with a swift change of subject.

"Why—yes—of course," Steve said.

"I know you're handy with a gun. If I git killed before I find my man, an' I'm liable to, I want you to promise me to git him if you ever find out who done it."

There was an intensity about the Dane's manner which struck an answering chord in Steve, who was already seething with indignation.

"I promise, so help me God," he said earnestly.

They put the body on Pete's horse and carried it to the camp. Then Steve left the Dane alone with his dead and started for his own camp. Wild Pete had displayed another peculiar streak in his make-up by insisting that Steve get word to Bishop Compton, the Mormon Bishop of Clearfield.

"Charley," he had declared, "must have a Christian burial."

Steve was riding moodily along when three horsemen cut into his trail diagonally from behind a small knoll a hundred yards in advance. Steve stiffened in the saddle and his teeth came together with a snap. He recognized the men instantly and was at once positive that they had had something to do with the murder of the Indian boy. Two of them were Sawtooth and Dutch Jake, the gunfighters he had defeated in Chub Springs. The third member of the trio was the handsome Mexican, Ortega.

There was no way to avoid a meeting had he desired it so Steve rode steadily ahead. He was quick to grasp the significance of the men's movements as they spread out fan shape to meet him, but he was powerless to prevent it unless he started the battle at once at long range, a thing he was loath to do until given a reasonable excuse.

The Mexican was on one side of him, almost facing the other two, and Steve was directly between when they came to a halt. Steve watched every movement with the keenness of a cat. He had no doubt but that if trouble started they would get him, but he confidently expected to take along at least one of them. All three showed plainly they recognized him. The two he had humiliated made no effort to conceal their animosity, but they allowed the Mexican to do the talking.

"Well, my friend, we meet again," Ortega greeted.

The tone was pleasant enough and Steve tried in vain to catch the sinister import—but he was none the less convinced that it was there.

"We do," Steve admitted briefly, no invitation for further courtesies in his voice.

"I heard you were riding for the Diamond M the day I was over to Clearfield," the Mexican went on pleasantly, disregardful of Steve's coldness.

"I ain't tryin' to keep it secret," Steve said ungraciously.

"The feed is poor here—very poor," Ortega said.

Steve was growing impatient. He wanted

things to get to moving, and if they would not start the ball to rolling he would.

"If you fellows don't start movin' your cattle off of this range at once, we're goin' to do it for you," he said bluntly.

The Mexican's eyes flew open in surprise.

"Why, I understood from Mr. Fink that we were welcome to use this range for several weeks," he said.

"Well, this ain't Fink. This is the Diamond M talkin', an' we mean business," Steve said grimly.

"Well, if there has been some mistake, of course—" Ortega began, but Sawtooth cut him short.

"Mistake, ——," he said huskily. "There ain't no mistake at all unless this guy makes one now. If he does it'll be his last one."

"Be still," Ortega commanded. "Now, my friend, what has happened that you must have this range at once? I understood that you were not going to use it."

Steve was at a loss. It had seemed to him that the time for action had arrived when Sawtooth butted in, but for some reason they had let it go by. He wondered if the astute Mexican had some deeper object in view than simply killing off an unknown cowboy. But he would not yield an inch, even so much as to explain why they had to have the range.

"We need the range, an' our stuff's on the way to it right now. That's enough," he stated flatly.

"Indeed," Ortega said with a sharp intake of breath. "If that's the case, boys, I reckon we'd better begin to move our cattle."

"Move ——!" Sawtooth roared. "This guy don't make me move nothin'."

Of the three men Steve saw that Sawtooth was the most antagonistic, though Dutch Jake was equally dangerous and only waiting an excuse to shoot; but for all that, Steve kept his eyes glued to the Mexican, whom he felt intuitively was by far the most dangerous.

"But I'll see that you move them," Ortega said smoothly. "You fellows get a move on and head those cattle back while I go to camp for more men."

"You —— greaser, you can't give me orders," Sawtooth sneered.

His hand dropped to the handle of his gun with the practised skill of the finished gun-fighter. Suspecting a plot to kill him while seemingly shooting at each other, Steve, likewise, went for his gun.

Steve had hardly got his gun from the holster, and Sawtooth had not got his half-drawn when Ortega fired. Sawtooth let his gun fall back with a howl of pain, and lifted a broken hand.

"Feel like obeying my orders?" the Mexican asked in the same tone of studied politeness he had assumed all through the interview.

Without a word Sawtooth and Dutch Jake rode away. Ortega watched them in silence, and then remarked to the puzzled Steve:

"Those fellows are no good. I will have to get some more men to move those cattle, so if you can hold your bunch back and give us a little time we'll soon be off your range."

"I—I—reckon we can do that," Steve almost stammered.

The Mexican was an enigma. Instead of acting as an enemy might be expected to act he seemed willing to go more than half-way toward friendship. And his courtesy was the one thing it took to disarm Steve, who owned one of those impressionistic natures which respond easily to the moods of others, meeting anger with anger, or politeness with graciousness. Steve was almost on the verge of thawing out in his attitude when the Mexican spoke again.

"Then I'll be going," was what he said, but as he wheeled his horse, exposing the right side where his rope hung, Steve gasped.

On the Mexican's saddle hung a long, tightly braided horsehair rope, and on the white hair close up to the hondo was an unmistakable blood stain.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIX-UP

THE rapid succession of events of the morning caused Steve to overlook the fact that he had not yet breakfasted, notwithstanding that his was an appetite which usually clamored for relief with the arrival of meal-time.

Instead of thinking of food he rode slowly, pondering over what had occured in the last twenty-four hours. Various conjectures ran through his mind. Was the attempt by the Indians to slaughter the cattle of the two outfits, the Diamond M and the Bucketbail, a scheme concocted by some one to get the range belonging to those two

outfits. Were the Indians and the Wineglass outfit in collusion? If so, who was the connecting link—or master mind?

Naturally his thoughts reverted to the perplexing Mexican. He ran over in his mind what he knew of Ortega. Eutsler had stated that night in Chub Springs that he believed the Mexican to be the most brainy, and therefore the most dangerous member of the Wineglass outfit. He had stated, further, that Ortega occupied some sort of double rôle by working for the Wineglass and running an independent outfit as well.

It was plain that he occupied some position of authority, or at least of influence, for it was he who had first talked Fink out of the range, and he had clearly dominated the two gunmen who were with him that morning. Most important of all, in Steve's estimation, was the damning evidence of the horsehair rope which branded him as the most brutal among cold-blooded murderers, unless there was some other member of the Wineglass outfit who likewise sported such a rope. That some member of that outfit was guilty Steve never doubted.

But opposed to all this was the man's courteous manner, and his apparent readiness to give up the range. One thing Steve determined to do, however, was to keep a vigilant eye on the slick Mexican, and connect him up if possible with the murder of Indian Charley.

Another thing that bothered Steve was the personality of the man Metcalf. He had taken a violent antipathy to the fellow at first sight, but he recognized that the Wineglass foreman had ability of the first order. Whether he had courage to go with it was doubtful, but he certainly possessed a dominating personality. Steve doubted that Metcalf would be the least bit subservient to the Mexican, and therefore he was puzzled to understand their relations toward each other. In the end his opinion was that both of them were up to something sinister—just how sinister, the brutal murder of the Indian boy gave an inkling.

Suddenly looking up Steve was startled to see the white faces of many Herefords pouring out of the cañon that led down from the Trail Creek divide. He had been unaware of the passing of time, but now he observed that it was nearly noon. At that he could scarcely understand how Bob, singlehanded, or even with the help of Heb Cross, had contrived to get the big bunch of cattle so far in that time. He spurred up but before he could reach the cattle they were spreading out, a gigantic red and white fan, passing through and absorbing the closest bunches of Wineglass cattle.

"That Mexican won't have a chance to prove whether or not he was acting in good faith when he promised to pull back them cattle," Steve mused regretfully.

Steve picked his way through the brush to the top of the divide, the trail itself being packed as tightly with cattle as sardines in a can. Having no desire to emulate Wild Pete by riding back up the hill at top speed, he did not reach the top until most of the cattle were over the divide. Down Trail Creek he could hear the whoops of men so he waited, watching with the true cattle-lover's enjoyment the broad backs as they crowded by.

At length the tail-enders came dragging along, with six riders crowding them closely. Besides Bob and Heb there was Bill Cummins and three strange riders, evidently belonging to the Bucketbail. This explained why the cattle had been moved so far. The strangers gazed at Steve curiously, while Cummins hung his head sheepishly.

"Who's runnin' this outfit?" Steve asked quizzically.

"Right now I am," Bob answered. "I know I ain't goin' to herd this bunch, so when these fellers come along I made 'em git busy an' help shove 'em over the top where we can turn 'em loose. What kind of a lop-sided country is this where they herd their cattle like sheep? Why don't they turn 'em loose like they do in a real cow country? What've they got riders for if it ain't to gather 'em, an' cut 'em out from other outfits? This thing of everybody tryin' to hold the exclusive rights to some perticklar corner of range plumb enrages me."

"I'll tell you why, feller," a cowboy from the Bucketail spoke up, "it's because the Diamond M has got an old woman for a boss who don't know a Hereford from a sheep."

"Careful," Steve warned icily.

"I wasn't referrin' to Mrs. Gibbs, she's all right," the cowboy explained. "I meant Eutsler. He insists on us keepin' our outfits separated from everybody else which is purty soft for him considerin' that we have the end where all the hard work is."

"Is that why Fink was so anxious to have the Wineglass turn out on this range?" Steve asked curiously.

"Fink is one long-headed hombre. If they run on our range we run on theirs," the cowboy said with a grin.

"That sounds reasonable, and as long as there is plenty of free range there is no sense in tryin' to keep cattle separated because they happen to belong to different outfits. Everything can be fished out proper in the round-ups. Yes, it's plumb sensible except for one thing—an' that is, if one or more outfits happen to be composed of crooks the other fellers are given 'em more or less of a free hand," Steve ruminated, watching the Bucketbail men closely out of the corner of his eye.

"See here, feller," Bill Cummins exclaimed, flushing angrily, "ain't you a little new to this country to be throwin' out insinuations."

"I see there is lots of people plenty touchy on that subject around here," Steve replied meaningly.

A lengthy Bucketbail cowboy who went by the descriptive name of Shanks, broke in soothingly—

"I reckon these two outfits can git their stuff back from anywhere—providin' they don't git to fightin' each other."

"Don't be too sure of that," Steve retorted.

Then he told them of the murder of Wild Pete's boy, omitting, however, any reference to the horsehair rope. He was taking no chances on Ortega being warned, and he wished to get the conclusive evidence against the Mexican solely by his own efforts.

The men listened with sober faces. Steve noticed that the Bucketbail men exchanged covert glances.

"Heb," Steve continued, "go down an' tell your bishop that Wild Pete wants him to come up an' give the boy a decent burial, will you?"

"You bet I will," Heb agreed with enthusiasm. "I want to see the bishop about this anyhow."

He whirled his horse and fled down the trail toward Clearfield.

"Well there's no use to argue about how the cattle ought to be run. They're mixed now so that it'll take a round-up to cut 'em out. Steve ain't had a square meal since yesterday mornin', so let's all go to camp," Bob invited.

"No; we'll go back to the ranch, an' git our camp ready to move to Bear Creek tomorrow," Shanks refused.

"Well, what do you make of it, Bob?" Steve asked after the Bucketbail men had gone. The two were alone in camp where Bob was busily cooking dinner, while Steve lay at ease upon a pile of blankets.

"Well," Bob said judiciously, "just between ourselves I think it's a —— of a layout; but as you've elected to stick it out it's up to us to do some tall ridin'. So far the only people I've seen that didn't act crooked is them two women we work for, an' maybe Jack Eutsler. But as far as Eutsler's concerned the game has got clear beyond him."

"It looks that way to me," Steve agreed soberly. "For the time bein' it's us two against the field, with maybe Wild Pete to help us some."

"For my part I class that big, four-flushin' Swede as mebbe just a little bit worse than the rest of 'em," Bob said.

After dinner they saddled fresh horses, picked up a small bunch of cattle which were already trying to get back on the reservation, and shoved them back over the divide. The cattle were roaming around restlessly, dissatisfied with the poor feed.

"I hope Eutsler gits back to-day, an' them Cross twins git done chasin' after their bishop," Steve said plaintively. "Somebody has sure got to night-herd for a few nights."

A half-dozen riders appeared on the top of a low ridge.

"Who comes, I wonder?" Bob murmured.

"Must be that Mexican with his men," Steve replied. "Guess we'd better ride down an' meet 'em."

It proved to be Ortega, with the Pecos Kid, and four riders whom neither Bob nor Steve had seen before.

"It seems we are a little late to avoid a mix-up, my friends," the Mexican greeted.

"I didn't git back in time to stop the boys," Steve explained, his eyes unconsciously fixed upon the horsehair rope upon the Mexican's saddle.

Bob, on his part, was gazing at the Pecos Kid with the same degree of horror. The dark, scowling features of the Kid filled him with the same repulsion he had experienced when he first saw him in the saloon at Chub Springs.

The Wineglass riders could not help but sense the ill feeling. The air was electric with animosity.

"What's become of the foremen of these socalled outfits?" the Pecos Kid asked suddenly.

"Likewise I'm curious to know what's become of yours," Steve countered.

"Answer my question," the Pecos Kid shot back insultingly.

"Mr. Metcalf is still under the doctor's care following the assault upon him by that crazy Dane," Ortega said quietly.

In spite of his prejudice against the Mexican Steve could not resist his quiet courtesy. Coldly as he could, and pointedly overlooking the Pecos Kid he told about the trouble with the Indians.

"It is really better then for all of us to handle our cattle together," Ortega ventured. "There will be enough of us to take care of the savages if they start making trouble again."

"They was actin' within their rights in a way, an' I don't know as I'm any more worried about them than I am certain cattle outfits," Steve said bluntly.

"If you are referring to the Wineglass outfit," Ortega said smoothly, "I don't think you need worry. I, myself, run an independent brand, the D dash, and so far I have had no trouble."

Steve felt himself at a disadvantage with this smooth polished talker. He determined to take charge of the conversation himself for a few minutes.

"Do you know anything about how Wild Pete's Indian boy come to be dragged to death?" he asked sharply.

There was not the slightest indication that any of the men were surprized by the question. In fact they remained as expressionless as stones with the exception of Ortega, who raised his eyebrows with polite interest.

"We hadn't heard," he said.

"That so? I thought perhaps you might know all about it," Steve said boldly.

"You surprize me," Ortega exclaimed.

"Look here," the Pecos Kid snapped savagely, "you two *hombres* are gittin' too —— numerous on this range. You are the —— who shot the lights out in the saloon in Chub Springs the other night and prevented me ventilating that —— Dane. I heard, too, about the ranacaboo you run on Sawtooth an' Dutch Jake. Now I'm tellin' you—one more yap out of you, an' I'll puncture your hide in a dozen places."

Steve's hand flew to his gun belt, and came back with the single wrist flip which he had practised for years, and which he fondly believed made him unbeatable with a gun. At the same time he twisted sideways and down in the saddle. Quick as he was he felt something hot across the side of his head. At the same time he saw the Pecos Kid's hat fly into the air. Both were temporarily astounded at the unexpected speed of the other.

"Stop that," Ortega's voice snapped. "Next thing you fellows will be hitting each other."

Before Steve could pull trigger again, or Bob do more than finger his gun, Ortega was covering the Wineglass men.

"I'll kill the ——" the Pecos Kid raged.

"You'll do nothing of the kind—but some day you may compel me to kill you," the Mexican said in a deep tone, vibrant with danger.

It seemed to Steve and Bob that a long suppressed hostility between the two men, or a possible rivalry had suddenly ceased to smolder and burst into flame. But the Pecos Kid was at too much disadvantage to accept the challenge. Instead, scowling evilly, he sullenly allowed his gun to slip back into its holster.

"Put up your guns too, gentlemen," the Mexican said evenly, a command notwithstanding the softness of his voice.

To rob it of its sting he continued—

"I don't blame you for taking offense, but this will not happen again—when I am present."

Reluctantly Steve put up his gun, and wiped the merest trickle of blood from his face.

"I don't want that guy to think he's got anything on me," he said. "If we ever try that over again I'll be the fastest. And that goes for the rest of you."

"Go on," the Pecos Kid scoffed. "It's just luck that you got off with a scratch. Next time I'll be lookin' for that squirm of yours. And that pardner of yours—you make me laugh. You throwed a bluff down at Chub Springs about him bein' faster than you. Why I could take a nap, and wake up in time to git that feller while he was still thinkin' about shootin'."

"That'll do," Ortega said harshly.

Being the only man with his gun in hand he was still able to enforce discipline as he saw it.

The Pecos Kid flushed with anger and glared at the Mexican, but discreetly remained silent.

Ortega carefully replaced his gun, folded his hands on the saddle horn, and leaned ahead lazily.

"You fellows think you are pretty fast with a gun, don't you?" he asked indolently. "See that squirrel?"

An inquisitive gray ground squirrel was watching them curiously from the top of a small mound, twenty feet away. Suddenly the Mexican's hand flew to his side, and his gun appeared like a flash of grayish light. In a fraction of a second the ground squirrel was tumbling about with a bullet through the top of its head.

"Don't any of you get the illusion that you are real fast," he said quietly.

"Or handier with a rope I presume," Steve said angrily, nettled at seeing a feat performed which he doubted his ability to duplicate.

"Nor that either," Ortega agreed pleasantly.

Then he smiled amiably.

"Since we'll all have to work together let's have no more trouble. We don't want to have to be grabbing guns every time we see a rider on the horizon."

"Now you're talkin' sense," Bob Logan put in heartily.

"Just a minute before we bury any hatchets," Steve interrupted. "Let's git this in our minds clear. Who's runnin' this Wineglass outfit, you or Metcalf?"

"Mr. Metcalf, of course. I sometimes act in his place when he has to be away," Ortega explained.

Steve was sure he caught the beginning of ironical smiles on the faces of several of the Wineglass men. He felt completely checkmated, and deep in his heart he blamed the Mexican. He was furious at himself for letting the man get the upper hand, yet the feeling he instinctively felt was good for him inasmuch as it taught him not to underestimate the enemy's ability; henceforth he resolved to be more cautious.

"Well, come on, Bob," Steve said disgustedly. "We're just wastin' our time here."

They rode away without molestation.

"What do you make of that bunch?" Steve asked when they were out of hearing.

"Plumb bad—all but the Mexican," Bob replied without hesitation.

"So you've fell for the greaser have you?" Steve asked. "What'd you say if I was to tell you he was the fellow who dragged the Injun kid to death?"

"I'd say you was off your base. He don't look like that kind of people to me. He's pulled you out of two shootin' scrapes today—an' besides, a feller that can shoot like he can don't need to resort to no rope. You're lettin' your prejudices ride you, Steven. It's the Pecos Kid you want to watch. He's poison—rank poison," Bob asserted positively.

Steve was somewhat nettled. It was on the tip of his tongue to mention the matter of the hair rope, but he checked it until he could produce absolute proof against which his pardner could not argue. He made no comment until they had ridden half a mile; then he muttered, half to himself:

"I ain't worried about the Pecos Kid. If we ever clash again he'll be the corpse. But Ortega—well, I'm sure goin' to practise a lot of gun-throwin'."

CHAPTER IX

STEVE LEARNS—VARIOUS THINGS

ALTHOUGH Bob rode hard all night, and Steve half the night, a number of little bunches of cattle had slipped back to the reservation by morning. The boys ate a hurried breakfast and began to gather up the vagrants.

"Just like boilin' coffee in a collander," Bob grumbled.

It was ten o'clock before any one arrived. Three horsemen joined them as they were getting the cattle collected at the foot of Trail creek trail. They proved to be the Cross brothers, and a peculiar-looking man of middle age with closely cropped black whiskers.

Closer inspection showed the boys that his peculiar appearance was due to his almost abnormal muscular development above the waist, and that being unused to riding a horse he sat his saddle like a sack of flour. Though not so tall, he looked to be as heavy as Wild Pete and as strong, but in a different way. Hard work had plainly stooped his tremendous shoulders, but he radiated strength with every movement.

He was roughly dressed in overalls and jumper, and his hands showed calluses induced by years of hard toil. Both boys were astounded when this man was proudly introduced to them by Brig as the idolized Bishop Compton.

The bishop shook hands with them gravely.

"We are on our way to get the unfortunate Indian boy," he explained. "A wagon with two of our ward teachers follows."

"I'm glad you're goin' to give Wild Pete a helpin' hand, bishop," Steve said gratefully.

"We would be remiss in our duties if we didn't lend a helping hand even to the Gentiles; though this Indian lad is not a Gentile. He is of the chosen seed of Israel, a direct, lineal descendant of Manasseh, the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. The proper name for the Indians is Lamanites. Their progenitor was Laman, the rebellious son of Lehi who fled from Jerusalem in the troublous days of Zedekiah the last king of Judah, as is explained in the first book of Nephi, in the Book of Mormon. Therefore——"

"I reckon you're dead right, bishop," Steve interrupted, "but it's gittin' hot, an' Pete may be havin' trouble keepin' his boy an' we've got to shove these cattle before they begin to sulk. I don't know much about your religion but some other time I'll be glad to listen to you talk."

"We can't do anything until the wagon comes, so I'll just ride along with you and expound to you the first principles of the Gospel: Faith, Repentance, Baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost."

"Say, it strikes me you are a funny kind of a bishop," Steve suggested, determined that if he had to listen to a missionary he would make the missionary talk about something he was interested in.

But not for worlds would he have let the bishop think that he was not highly interested——

"I always imagined that a bishop was a guy with a black suit of clothes, a high collar, an' lily-white hands."

"So they are—so they are—among the Gentiles. But we, the chosen instruments of the Lord work without purse or script. Though we serve the Lord, each in humble capacity, we all must earn our own living."

"Just what does a bishop have to do?" Steve inquired.

"A bishop is the father of his ward. It is my duty to give counsel and cheer to my people in the ward, look after their welfare through the quorum of ward teachers, and to preside over the sacrament meetings," Bishop Compton explained.

"An' preach I suppose. I'll have to come an' hear you preach some time," Steve promised.

"We have no regular preachers like they do in the World. I merely preside over the meeting, and call up those brethren to address the people whom the spirit of the Lord moves me to call," the bishop explained with dignity.

So they rode along, Steve getting a great deal of reliable information concerning the customs of his new neighbors, and incidentally making a rather favorable impression on Compton by his willingness to listen. Finally the bishop worked around to a discussion of the relation of the Mormons to the local Gentiles, mentioning at once in this connection, Mrs. Gibbs and her daughter Jennie.

"Fine, sensible women, both of them. They are a big help in the social affairs of the ward; but stiff-necked and worldly. They refuse to soften their hearts and pray to the living God to reveal to them the truth of the everlasting Gospel, as it has been restored to the earth through the Prophet, Joseph Smith. I come in contact with them often, especially Miss Jennie. You see I keep the post-office, and she comes after her mail almost every morning——

"By ——," he broke off with unbishoplike vehemence, "that reminds me—Jennie was at my place last night and heard Brig tell me about his trouble with the Indians, and how you singlehandedly saved the Diamond M and Bucketbail cattle from destruction."

Steve blushed.

"I hope they didn't pile it on too thick," he said fervently.

"She insisted that I be sure to tell you to come to the ranch today because she wanted to see you."

Steve at once lost interest in the bishop's discourse. The thought of Jennie filled him with a strange elation, and an equally strange bashfulness. He longed to see her again, but dreaded to appear before her in the rôle of hero. He was proud of what

he'd done, and was glad to have her know about it—from others. But having to tell it to her himself was a different matter.

"Why can't I ride south over the cattle range until I git due east of Clearfield, an' then ride over there without havin' to come back here?" he asked the bishop.

"You can—but it's a darn rough trail across."

"Tell me the landmarks. I ought to be able to git a squint at practically all of the Wineglass cattle, an' still make it to the ranch by dark, hadn't I?" he inquired.

"You ought to, though if you are plannin' to go to the Wineglass camp at the Bull corrals on the head of Devil creek you'll find it a long way off your trail," the bishop replied.

"I ain't got no inclination to make 'em any social call, but I do want to see their cattle," Steve answered, convinced that it was imperative for him to get a line on the condition of the enemy at once.

He had difficulty getting Bob to see the necessity for him riding at once into the Wineglass territory, and when he did accomplish this it required another long argument to get Bob to consent for him to go alone. But eventually Steve got away, though without dinner—a thing he was beginning to get used to.

He kept Sitting Bull at a fast walk, keeping to the tops of the highest ridges. As the only feed available was on the timberless bottom lands, the cattle were crowded there. Very soon Steve reached a pinnacle from which he could get a comprehensive view of almost the entire range.

At once he perceived that all the Wineglass cattle had been driven on the range used by the Diamond M and Bucketbail. By being bunched in so small a space, compared to the number of cattle, it was possible for Steve to get a glance at practically every animal belonging to the Wineglass. A week later it would be impossible for a man to see more than a fraction of them with any assurance that he was not seeing the same ones twice.

Steve had a "hunch" that he should, if possible, make an estimate of the total number of cattle the Wineglass ran. Any but a seasoned cattleman would have considered it pure folly to try to make an estimate by simply riding over the range, but the cowboy knew that he could come close—that he would not be off more than one tenth the total number of the cattle. It was slow, eye-straining work, but by sunset it was accomplished.

It was dark before Steve reached the ranch. He was ravenously hungry, and he knew that Mrs. Gibbs would cook him a wonderful supper as soon as she learned he had not eaten since breakfast. Yet he hung around the barn as long as he could, dreading to go in the house. Finally he mustered up courage to knock at the door.

It opened and Jennie stood before him in a dainty little gingham apron, with a dish towel draped coquettishly over her shoulder.

"Why, it's Steve," she explained, giving him her hand. "Come on in."

Steve thrilled at the firm pressure of her hand, and the handshaking was over all too quickly. He dropped his hat unostentatiously by the side of the door and followed her inside, making a mighty struggle to appear at ease. Mrs. Gibbs came out of the kitchen with a wet dish-rag in her hand, and began scolding the cowboy good-naturedly.

"Well, Steve Malty, it's about time you were showing up around here. Ever since we heard about what you done we've been looking our eyes out for you to come and tell us all about it."

"Nothin' much to tell," Steve demurred in modest confusion.

"We know," Mrs. Gibbs said soberly. "If it hadn't been for you we would have lost all the good cattle we owned—and everything else. We two women would have lost everything we own except the clothes we stand up in. And we've worked and struggled so hard for years to get out of debt——"

Her voice broke and tears began to course down her kind old cheeks.

Steve blushed in furious embarrassment.

"It was a wonderful thing to do," Jennie said with ringing sincerity.

Impulsively she reached up and kissed him squarely. Steve stood in the middle of the room and cursed himself inwardly for a blithering idiot who didn't know how to act.

"Aw, it wasn't nothin'," he blurted out. "Wild Pete would have done it if I hadn't."

The Gibbs women were tactful. Perceiving that their praise and gratitude would only add to the cowboy's distress they quickly changed the subject.

"I'll bet you're hungry," Mrs. Gibbs exclaimed.

When Steve confessed the fact she set about preparing him a splendid meal with her own hands, thus showing more gratitude in that simple way than any amount of talk. Jennie set the table for him from which the supper dishes had just been cleared away, and talked about the murder of the young Indian boy. From that, the talk drifted to other range matters, and Steve began to recognize the fact that the girl was no novice in range affairs. Very soon he was perfectly at ease, and chatting with her as freely as he would another cowboy.

"There is one thing I'd like to know," Steve said, after he had eaten and was sitting in solid comfort watching the women wash up the dishes, "an' that is, what kind of a layout is this Wineglass outfit? Who does it belong to?"

"I can tell you a little about it, perhaps," Jennie said. "It belongs to an eastern syndicate. The manager of it is Adrian Walker, the son of one of the largest stockholders. He was out here last Fall and I happened to get acquainted with him. He told me a little about their business. Metcalf does practically all the actual management, and Adrian is only sort of a glorified bookkeeper. Of course he has the authority to do anything he wishes but he has the utmost confidence in Metcalf. I had a letter from him the other day and he expects to be here soon to spend the Summer. So if his outfit is bothering us he will straighten it all up at once."

Steve felt all his animation and enthusiasm go dead within him. Like all other cowboys he shared the common belief in the deadly attractiveness of the "eastern dude" for western women, a fact directly responsible for the sometimes vindictive behavior of cowboys toward "tenderfeet."

He felt himself hopelesly outclassed at the start. Already Jennie received letters from this Easterner, and called him by his first name. Worse, she believed that he could set matters right on the range by a word. In only one respect did he feel himself the equal of this unknown rival, that was in actual knowledge of the cattle business. He turned to this point as a drowning man to a straw.

"Maybe that feller will have a hard time findin' out if anything is wrong if his men don't want him to know it."

"Do you think there is something really wrong with the outfit itself?" Jennie asked.

"I don't know, but my guess is the men workin' for it will stand watchin'."

"You think they may be rustlers?"

"How many cattle are they supposed to run?"

"Thirty thousand."

The reply brought Steve to his feet in excitement.

"You sure?" he demanded.

"Positively."

"And Walker thinks they have got that many on this range?"

"He certainly does."

"Then he's due for an awful surprize when he counts 'em next time," Steve asserted.

"Do you suppose their own riders have been stealing their cattle?" Jennie cried in amazement.

"I don't suppose a thing, but I'll stake my reputation that if he counts his cattle at the June round-up he won't count more than twenty thousand head," Steve declared.

"I'll certainly tell Adrian," Jennie promised. "If the men are stealing from their own outfit they will also steal from others. We must be careful."

Steve's discovery of something tangible to work upon caused his spirits to rise again. In dealing with rustlers he knew he had nothing to fear from any Easterner. When he rose to go Jennie followed him outside, for no reason at all, apparently, unless to say good night. But for some reason she did not say it.

The evening was warm, and the mellow moonlight seemed to induce a desire to linger in its friendly embrace. They stood by the door talking for a while, then, with no suggestion from either they moved toward a round chopping block within the shadow of a mammoth wood-pile. They sat together on the block in exciting nearness with Steve tingling with a wild exhilaration.

They talked now of other things than the cattle business—various things which Steve did not remember. It was the amazing nearness of the girl, and not her words which engrossed his attention.

"You mustn't stay out at camp like a hermit," he heard her saying. "You must come down and visit us once in a while,

and then there is a dance at Clearfield almost every week—you and your friend Bob mustn't fail to take them in. They open and close with prayer and Bishop Compton keeps rather rigid order, but they have a good time just the same."

"I don't know," Steve said. "I always hate to go to dances where I'm a stranger."

It was an awful whopper, as Bob, who was modest and retiring would have testified. More than once Steve's forwardness among strangers had brought down Bob's condemnation upon him. But Steve did not know he was lying. He was fishing for a definite result and he would say anything which at the moment promised to help achieve that result, and give no thought to such unimportant details as its truthfulness.

"I'll introduce you, and I'll promise that those Mormon girls won't let you be lonesome long. You'll have lots of competition to make it interesting because most of the Mormon men think they need another wife."

They talked on in semi-serious fashion, with Steve fighting down his intense desire to touch the girl. For all her friendliness she had given him no real encouragement toward sentimentality, and he dared not risk getting "fresh." It was with almost a feeling of relief that he saw a horseman ride up to the barn.

At once Steve forgot his moon-madness and became alert. Midnight visitors to barns were objects of just suspicion. They were well concealed in the shadow of the wood-pile, and Steve shifted position enough to be able to get his gun.

"Keep still," he directed, "I'm goin' to find out what that fellow is up to."

"Why, it's Jack Eutsler," Jennie recognized. "I know his walk."

Steve felt rather taken down as he resumed his seat. Presently Eutsler came out of the barn and walked toward them stiffly.

"Jack," Jennie called softly.

The foreman jumped as though he had been shot at. Jennie laughed, and she and Steve advanced to meet the foreman.

"What did they do to you at the agency?" Jennie asked.

"They cussed me, an' threatened to do everything short of killin' me," Eutsler replied dismally. "The fool agent was worse than the Indians."

"But they done nothing serious?" Jennie queried anxiously.

"I'd rather call it serious. They let us go with the promise that they'd charge five dollars a head for every critter they caught across the line, an' the agent promised two dollars of it to the Injun that caught 'em over there."

"Why that will mean that it will take all our time to ride the line, for we can't afford to pay that," Jennie cried in dismay.

"For two dollars a head them Injuns will git the cattle whether they cross the line or not," Steve remarked.

"They sure will. Hogitsi an' a big bunch of his braves was camped right on the line tonight when I come by," Eutsler informed gloomily.

CHAPTER X

STEVE CONTINUES TO LEARN

THE next two weeks were strenuous ones for the Diamond M riders. It required the continuous efforts of all five of them to ride the reservation line. At that, some of the cattle slipped over by themselves, and others were driven over by the Indians. Eutsler was kept busy writing checks to pay the tribute, and the nerves of all were worn to a frazzle.

Most irritating of all was the attitude of the other outfits whose cattle were mixed with theirs. In every bunch the Indians captured were as many cattle belonging to the Bucketbail as to the Gibbs outfit, and there were always a few Wineglass cattle. In spite of this no rider from either outfit showed up to help ride the line.

There was an old working agreement between Eutsler and Fink that each was to pay the other's expenses when the occasion arose, and Fink had taken advantage of it to ask Eutsler to pay the Bucketbail's fines and had included the Wineglass, agreeing to be personally responsible for that debt.

Fink professed to be very busy riding on the other end of the range, although there was very little to do. This fact seemed to make no impression upon Eutsler except to make him irritable that the Bucketbail men were shirking on him. Steve was sure the foreman did not go deeply enough into the matter, and he lay awake nights trying to figure out causes. True enough, Fink came around every few days and settled up with Eutsler, but that didn't satisfy Steve. And there were other things which gave Steve cause for worry.

First and foremost was the fact the he had twice seen Ortega, and the man he seemed to hate, the Pecos Kid, on the reservation. On both occasions Ortega had stopped at the Diamond M camp alone. He had been polite and suave as usual, professing great distress over the attitude of the Indians, and promising to try to get Metcalf to send men to help ride the line.

Despite this Steve could not conquer his aversion to and suspicion of the man, and the horsehair rope he carried was a lively reminder of the promise he had made to Wild Pete. It added to his displeasure that Bob was taking a genuine liking to the Mexican, insisting that he was the only respectable member of the Wineglass outfit.

Steve was particularly anxious to ride over the entire range. It irked him to be kept in ignorance of his own range by the monotonous task of line-riding. He was dissatisfied with the trustful policy of Eutsler in leaving the bulk of the cattle to Fink. For three weeks they had been fighting back the same cattle over and over, for the stronger ones had tired of it and gone southward where they were never under the eye of a Diamond M rider.

These things worried him far more than the difficulty with the Indians. With the latter, to be exact, it savored strongly of a grim game. He had noticed that the Indians gave him a great deal more respect than they did the other riders. Even the morose Hogitsi respected him, although Steve had taken a number of cattle away from him—some of them when they were on the reservation. The Indians admired nerve, courage, and reckless riding, and Steve had them all. In addition, he treated the Indians as man to man without making the usual mistake of treating them with a childish display of benevolent interest, or trying to curry favor by flattery. This attitude, indeed, made him real friends among the Indians.

So disgusted with the whole business did he become that he decided to have a talk with Bob on the matter. Notwithstanding the flippancy with which he usually treated Bob he had great respect for the ability of his quiet partner.

"The trouble," Bob stated deliberately, "is that they've got Eutsler so worked up over this Indian question that he can't see anything else. All he can see is Injuns an' a reservation."

"That's it exactly," Steve agreed. "He's plumb forgot he's runnin' a cow outfit. My idea is that somebody is pullin' the strings to make him forgit himself. It's up to us to see what's carryin' on."

"What can we do?" Bob demanded practically. "If we don't do as we're told we'll git fired."

"If Eutsler would only quit an' take that ranch job——"

"He won't as long as he thinks he's needed here."

"Well, Robert, I'm goin' to ride the other end of this range whether I git fired or not. If I do I'll go in with Wild Pete an' make more money."

"For the love of Mike keep clear of that Dane," Bob said earnestly. "If you stick you'll be foreman here in another month at least."

"I'm goin' to see what's goin' on, regardless."

"All right, pardner," Bob gave in. "I'll contrive to drop some cattle up around the head of the Bannock this afternoon, an' I'll git Eutsler to go up there with me in the mornin' to git 'em. Then you skin out over the divide. Try to git back by dark for if you ain't I'm comin' to hunt you."

"You're a brick, Bob. For all your ladylike timidity you're sure there in a pinch."

"Aw, go on," Bob deprecated with a blush.

Bob's plan worked out according to schedule, and the following morning while it was still early enough to make a rider shiver with the cold, Steve was on his way. He crossed the Trail Creek pass and rode eastward until he struck the Blacksnake River.

So far he had seen only the comparatively level bench land which he had seen almost every day from the top of the divide. But as he turned south the range became much rougher, the rugged hills being broken by a number of good-sized creeks flowing into Devil Creek.

He was just turning his horse to follow up Devil Creek when he saw a rider coming rapidly toward him from the north. He halted and waited for the man to come up. It proved to be Wild Pete, as he had surmised.

"Whither away?" Steve asked.

"I'm just lookin' around for stray dogies, an' I wanted to find out who you was."

"Where's your dog bunch?"

"I've got most of 'em back in the bend,

an' I'm after the rest. I've been ridin' a hundred miles a day since I saw you last."

"How do you do it? I don't see how horses can stand to carry a man of your weight the way you ride."

"They can't. I kill 'em an' buy new ones. I can buy all I need from the Injuns at ten dollars a head," the Dane said carelessly.

"You're a —— fool to ride that way," Steve said crisply. "Some of these days you are goin' to want a good horse to make a ride mighty bad—an' you'll be left afoot. One good horse, well taken care of, is worth a hundred of the killable kind."

"Darn few times I've had to come in afoot," Wild Pete said lightly. "But come on. Let's ride up Monday Creek, an' drop over the top to Bear Creek, an' down to the Bucketbail camp."

"I'm with you," Steve said.

The big man rode as usual with no regard for his horse, and Steve was glad he happened to be riding Sitting Bull who could climb hills like a rabbit.

So fast they rode that the sun was scarcely two hours high when they reached the Bucketbail camp. Nothing was stirring around the camp and they supposed the men had gone to work until they saw the saddles lying around. Wild Pete let out a thunderous yell, and Fink, his four riders and a half dozen Wineglass men came pouring out of the tents in their underclothes, but with guns in hand.

Wild Pete roared with laughter, while the sleepy-eyed men gazed at them stupidly. Steve sat unsmiling, eyes and mind busy. Apparently the men were taking things easy while the Diamond M boys did the work. Yet Steve was not so sure. The men looked and acted tired, like men who were not yet rested from a hard day's work.

"What do you fellers want?" Fink demanded surlily.

"Just ridin' around," Steve said quickly, to forestall any reply by Wild Pete. "We thought we might make a trade of some sort with you."

"I thought you fellers was so —— busy you didn't have time to eat, the way Jack Eutsler has been cryin' around fer us to come help him," Bill Cummins sneered.

"What you got to trade?" the cowboy called Shanks, who possessed the commercial instinct, wanted to know.

"Oh, most anything," Steve said carelessly.

His eyes roamed around the camp apparently in search of trading material.

"That's a mighty good-lookin' saddle blanket there," he said. "I wouldn't mind havin' it if it was genuine Navajo like it pretends to be, but of course it's only imitation."

"Imitation!" Bill Cummins cried hotly. "That's my blanket, an' it's the real Navajo. It set me back twenty-five dollars that blanket did."

"Then the feller you bought it of was sure a good judge of character," Steve retorted derisively.

"Are you insinuatin' that I got stung on that blanket? I tell you it's the real stuff. Heft it," Bill cried wildly.

"What's the use—I got eyes," Steve jeered.

Nevertheless he swung down and picked up the blanket, feeling the weight and texture of it carefully.

"I reckon it's genuine," he acknowledged reluctantly.

"Ain't so —— smart as you thought you was," Bill gloated.

"Want to trade it?" Steve asked.

"It's too good a blanket to trade when it's so hard to git one as good—" Bill began to temporize, but Steve cut him short.

"I ain't got no time to haggle. I'm in a hurry."

"Where you goin'?"

"We're goin' over to the Wineglass camp—to see if they've been makin' an all night ride the same as you fellers," Steve shot out unexpectedly as he and Wild Pete rode away.

"Now what do you mean by that crack?" the Dane wanted to know.

"I meant to give 'em a shock, an' incidentally to let 'em know that I was wise to any little thing they was tryin' to pull."

"I'm still in the dark," the Dane confessed.

"Why should it be necessary for 'em to ride all night, an' sleep in the daytime when they don't do no night herdin'?"

"It ain't necessary—if they do it."

"Well, they did last night. They looked too sleepy for me, so I got that chance to finger a saddle blanket. Bill's was still wet and limp from sweat. It hadn't been off a horse's back two hours."

"Anythin' else you've noticed in your detectin'?"

"There's cattle missin'," Steve announced.

"How can you tell?"

"I just know—unless a lot of cattle have gone south, and the tendency is for 'em to go north."

He did not think it necessary to try to convince the Dane that he possessed an uncanny instinct which registered in his brain almost the exact number of cattle within the scope of his eyesight. But he possessed this instinct, and he was willing to bank on it.

From what he had seen thus far he was absolutely certain that a number of cattle were missing. Then a thought crossed his mind which illumined the whole subject; so simple that he wondered he had not thought of it before. What fertile soil, this, to produce a crop of rustlers! The entire range was used by three outfits. One of these was owned by a syndicate thousands of miles away; one by bedridden old man Bates; the other by Mrs. Gibbs and Jennie. What a chance for the unscrupulous! And to give them further freedom to commit their depredations there was the Indian trouble to occupy the attention of the few honest men.

They rode along in silence, Steve thinking of many things, but automatically registering and filing away in his brain the number and condition of the cattle they passed; the Dane keenly alert for anything wearing one of his numerous brands. Finally they reached a point from which the main camp of the Wineglass outfit was plainly visible.

"Goin' down there?" Wild Pete asked.

"Mebbe—if I can go alone."

"If you go I go," the Dane said emphatically.

"Reckon I'll not go then. I'm afraid you're not popular down there."

"Bosh! That outfit don't dare to look at me cross-eyed. If I rode into that camp they'd all faint, an' we could steal their guns before they come to."

"If you expect to keep on travelin' around this mundane sphere very long you'd best change them sentiments," Steve advised.

For answer the Dane turned his horse toward the camp, spurring into a run. They dashed into the Wineglass camp and Wild Pete let out one of his blood curdling roars. They half expected to see men here come tumbling out of bed, but for the moment only the cook appeared.

"You needn't make so much noise," he said crankily. "We saw you a half a mile off."

"Who all is around here?" the Dane asked.

Just then the flap of a tent opened and Ortega appeared. "Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted suavely.

Steve scowled. At every turn he seemed to run across the Mexican, and he felt that if there was a single set of brains back of all the trouble they belonged to Ortega. One word to Wild Pete, he knew, would terminate the Mexican's career; but he dared not say it. He had no conclusive evidence as yet against the man, and there was more than a possibility that Wild Pete would also be killed. The Mexican's conduct in the open was unimpeachable, so much so that it was irritating, because it required the same conduct in return.

"What's become of all your outfit?" Steve asked.

"They have all gone to work except Mr. Metcalf, and the Pecos Kid who are just inside the tent," was the startling reply.

Wild Pete shot erect in his stirrups and snorted as explosively as an angry grizzly.

"Why don't they show themselves," he bellowed truculently.

"We can if there is anybody crazy to see us——"

Metcalf's voice sounded from within the tent. A moment later he stepped blandly outside, with the malignant Pecos Kid crouched at his side—a faithful bodyguard. Scabs covered the wounds on Metcalf's face, a poignant reminder of his encounter with Wild Pete. Steve sat tensely in the saddle waiting for the explosion which he was sure was about to take place. Wild Pete was ready to precipitate it.

"I see you're still wearin' my brand, Metcalf," he said insultingly.

"Still got 'em," Metcalf replied without rancor.

Steve and the Dane were dumfounded. While they were trying to reconcile themselves to this new attitude, Ortega began to speak smoothly:

"These drunken rows—nothing ever comes of them but trouble. That is why I make a point of never taking more than one drink."

"I reckon I gave you cause for what you done," Metcalf admitted.

Steve could not understand the game. The quarrel at Chub Springs had not been a drunken row. Each man had taken but one drink.

"I can let that pass; but I want to know if it was a drunken row that caused my boy to be killed, an' my cattle chased out of the bend?" the Dane asked truculently.

"I don't know a thing about that," Metcalf denied.

"Maybe not; but if I ever find out you had anything to do with it I'll strangle you."

"We had nothing to do with it," Metcalf insisted.

"It must have been the Indians," Ortega contributed.

"It wasn't the Injuns. It was somebody belongin' to this outfit, an' when I find who it was I'll tear him to pieces," the Dane declared, clinching his great hands suggestively.

"You're barkin' up the wrong tree," Metcalf said mildly.

This pacifist attitude was far harder to meet than open hostility would have been. Both Steve and the Dane would have welcomed open warfare, but that was plainly the thing which the two dominant characters of the Wineglass meant to avoid. As for the Pecos Kid, his eyes burned with venom; but in the presence of the other two men he seemed to have no will to act. Steve met the Kid's gaze challengingly, and the Kid's murderous features flushed angrily, but he failed to accept the challenge. Thoroughly disgusted, Steve turned away, but was stopped by Ortega.

"I have persuaded Mr. Metcalf that enough of our cattle are getting on the reservation to justify a couple of riders being sent to help ride the line. If the Diamond M will board us I and my—the Pecos Kid will go and help you," the Mexican volunteered.

"I reckon it'll be all right," Steve said, not knowing whether to be pleased or alarmed by the offer.

After leaving the Wineglass camp Steve and Wild Pete rode on southward for five or six miles to the top of a butte which the Dane assured Steve afforded a good view of that part of the range that he had not yet seen. Steve was surprized to see that the range on to the southward for many miles was level. This flat, he was told, extended to Chub Springs. But bordering the flat on the east, and swinging around to the northward was a wild-appearing country broken by lava formations and deep cut coulées. There were no cattle visible on this part of the range.

The cowboys turned eastward, crossed the head of Devil creek, and rode on until they reached a sluggish Creek coming out of a low pass in the mountain.

"This is Squaw Creek," Wild Pete explained, "and you want to remember if you ever want to go east from here that this is the only pass across Devil Creek mountain for more'n fifteen miles—in fact until you reach the end of the mountain just this side of the Blacksnake, almost opposite my camp."

"I reckon I've got a purty good idea of the range now," Steve said with satisfaction.

Suddenly the Dane began to curse, the object of his wrath being a sheep camp a little way from Squaw Creek.

"That's what's puttin' the cattle business on the hummer," he stated bitterly.

"Right now all I'm interested in is whether they've got anything to eat," Steve grinned.

Against Pete's protest they rode close to the camp. A pair of dogs disputed their arrival noisily. A head appeared for a moment in the window in the back of the wagon, then ducked back out of sight. A moment later a Winchester was poked through the window.

"Stand yer distance," a voice called.

They stopped.

"What do you want?" demanded the man in the camp.

"Somethin' to eat," Steve replied promptly.

"What outfit do you belong to?"

"None of your —— business," Steve returned cheerfully.

"Wineglass?"

"No."

"Come on then," invited the sheepherder.

They rode around to the front of the camp where a man was waiting for them with a rifle slung carelessly, but ready for instant use, in the crook of his arm.

"I didn't know you at first," he said.

"Why, you're the feller that had the fight with Sawtooth," Steve recognized.

"I'm much obliged to you for savin' my carcass. My name is Al Young. Come in an' eat."

He was a likable fellow, and even Wild Pete overcame his aversion to sheepherders enough to be sociable.

"I've been ordered off of Squaw Creek, an' I guess I'll go," Young said as he turned mutton chops in a frying pan.

"I ain't lookin' for trouble, an' besides the feller that done the tellin' was real decent about it."

"Mexican was he?" Steve inquired.

"Looked a little like one, but he talked like a school-teacher."

"Ortega," Steve said.

"Funny kind of a greaser—if he was one," Young stated.

They finished their meal, and were preparing to leave when Young said:

"If you fellers happen to come to my camp again wave a handkerchief three times. My herder might be here an' he's feelin' plumb irritable at cowpunchers lately. You see they've been drivin' a lot of cattle through the Squaw Creek pass, an' not particular about dodgin' around the herd."

"Did you notice the brands on those cattle?" Steve asked sharply.

"No I didn't. In the interests of peace I'm keepin' as far away from 'em as I can."

"You say you are leavin' here—right away?"

"Just leavin' this creek. I aim to Summer around here though, for I can't see why I ain't as good a right to this range as anybody else."

"Then do me a favor if you can, will ye?" Steve pleaded. "If you git a chance just see if any of 'em is branded on the left ribs with either a Diamond M, or a Bucketbail."

Painstakingly Steve described the shape of the brands by tracing them out on Sitting Bull's shoulder with a gloved forefinger.

"I'll try," the campmover promised.

"Well, we've found somethin' to pay for our trip," Steve commented jubilantly to his friend as they rode away from the sheep camp.

"Not necessarily," the Dane returned dryly. "There's lots of swamp grass along the Blacksnake on the other side of this pass, an' the Wineglass keeps a Summer camp over there anyway to watch that side of the range. Chances are they're just drivin' their own stuff over there to better feed. What you've got on your mind is all wrong anyway. If they are rustlin' they'd either trail out toward Chub Springs, or else toward the mouth of the Blacksnake, to a shippin' point. They wouldn't drive 'em back here into the mountains where they'd have to herd 'em."

"Mebbe so," Steve said reluctantly, "but if it wasn't for that fool pardner of mine gittin worried I'd take another day an' look into that business.

CHAPTER XI

A JOKE THAT FAILED

IT WAS after dark when Steve parted from Wild Pete at the latter's camp. Despite the several significant facts he had discovered during the day, in the main he felt baffled. When he reached the Diamond M camp Eutsler and the Cross boys had retired, but Bob was waiting up by a cheerful camp-fire to cook his partner's supper. While Steve ate they talked in low tones that did not carry to the sleeping tent.

"Boss find out where I had gone?" Steve asked.

"Yep."

"Sore?"

"Don't think so—much. Might have been but old Kebro has got over bein' sick, an' he come around for a talk. Eutsler's purty tickled 'cause he figures now the Injuns'll be good. Find out anything yourself?"

Steve related the events of his day's pilgrimage.

"Well, keep everythin' under your hat," Bob advised.

"Why so?" Steve demanded. "It looks to me like it was time for the outfit to git busy on the other end of the line."

"Mebbe; but it can wait. If the Injun trouble stops, Eutsler will think he can be spared to run the ranch, an' there's a good chance for you to git to be cattle boss, an' we can look into things to suit ourselves. But if he thinks there is any rustlin' goin' on he'll stick till the cows come home. See?"

"You think I stand a chance at that job?" Steve queried anxiously.

"From all I can learn you've sure made a hit with the owners of this outfit," Bob said seriously.

Steve's heart bounded joyously. Though reasonably certain of the same thing it pleased him more to be told so by another.

"I guess we'd better hold our fire for a while," he said thoughtfully. "I figure that the rustlers will take all Summer to clean up the best cattle in all these outfits, an' they've got a surprize comin' to 'em. When this Eastern dude comes along an' they have the calf round-up they'll make him think

everything is lovely because they will count the usual per cent. of calves.

"Naturally the cattle that have been rustled are strong, young stuff, and beef cattle, so there will be just as many cows an' calves. No doubt the rustlers bank on that strong. But when the time comes Jennie will see that young Walker demands a count. Right then there will be somethin' stirrin', an' that'll be our chance."

They talked long into the night, after the fire had died down, and only an occasional cracking ember punctuated their conversation. Under the influence of the night and the tried friendship of his pal, Steve became communicative—not in the ordinary sense of merely talking but of laying bare his very soul, his hopes, his aspirations.

In his talk Jennie occupied a large place, and Bob listened understandingly without trying to be funny over the matter. His sympathetic attitude was such as is possible only in those rare instances where male friendship has stood the test of adversity, as well as time and isolation.

When they finally rolled into their blankets Steve lay in sleepless ecstasy, dreaming the kind of dream that is neither daydreaming, nor yet the real thing; but which has the realism of the one, and the unrestrained promptings of the sub-conscious peculiar to the other.

He dreamed of the day when he would be foreman of the Diamond M, and how he would vindicate himself when the shortage of cattle was made known, and how he would ride to glory rounding up the rustlers in some sensational manner—just how he was not clear in his mind yet, but he would do it. Then he would present himself before Jennie—and his dreams grew happily nebulous.

In the morning he felt so ambitious that he volunteered to take the longest ride. Eutsler wanted a man to ride far down the Blacksnake to see if anything had got by in that direction. There were other cattle outfits there of unquestioned honesty, but the foreman preferred to get the cattle back at once rather than wait for a round-up.

Steve covered the territory far enough to find out there were no Diamond M cattle there, had dinner with a Brush Creek outfit, and started home. He climbed to the backbone that separated the two rivers and rode along it. It was on the reservation and the Indians had sometimes sneaked cattle over to collect indemnity.

He was playing along making fancy throws with his rope when he suddenly remembered that he had neglected the gun practise he had promised himself. He coiled up his rope, buckled it to the saddle, and selected a mark to shoot at. Holding his hand in the usual position he suddenly went for the gun. It came out, working smooth as clock-work, and he fired twice at a mark.

He slipped the gun back in the holster preparatory to another effort when his attention was attracted to a saddled, but riderless horse in the brush a short distance below him. Some Indian had left his horse there out of sight, and was himself, perhaps, hiding out behind some bush hoping to locate a bunch of cattle that he could slip across on to the reservation. Anyway, it looked like a matter that could stand investigation.

Keeping well out of sight he rode slowly down the hill until he reached the horse. Considerably to his surprize an Indian was lying on the ground not forty feet from the horse, evidently asleep, for his huge black felt sombrero was over his face protecting it from the sun. By the man's gear Steve knew him to be Hogitsi, the war chief.

"The lazy devil," Steve chuckled softly, "Just watch me wake him up."

He cat-footed his horse to within ten feet of the sleeping Indian, then very carefully aimed at the ground six inches from the man's head and fired.

His laughter ended abruptly, for the Indian did not move. Steve leaped from his horse in very near a state of panic. He tore the hat from the Indian's face, and shuddered at what he saw. Blood and brains were oozing from a small hole in the war chief's forehead. Steve turned the hat up to the sun and, as he expected, found a small hole through the felt—so small that he had overlooked it from his horse. The Indian had been murdered while he slept.

Realization of the foolish thing he had done in shooting by the man's ear caused Steve to glance around nervously. He trembled in sudden fear as his eyes rested upon two horsemen watching him curiously from the top of an adjoining ridge. Just as abruptly his fear left him, and he became cold and calm as he identified one of the men as Ortega. To the other man, his own boss, Eutsler, he paid no attention. Absolutely

expressionless he waited for the men to ride up.

Ortega's face seemed to express nothing but polite concern, but Eutsler's was black with anger and alarm.

"What the —— happened here?" the foreman demanded.

"Suppose you ask Ortega," Steve came back coolly.

For once the Mexican was jarred out of his composure.

"Me? I know nothing of this," he denied.

"I don't know what you're tryin' to put off on Ortega, but you'll have to explain this," Eutsler said sternly. "We heard a shot, an' in a couple of minutes we rode out in sight an' found you standin' over this dead Injun with a gun in your hand. Why did you murder him? Just when I git things settled with the Injuns you have to murder their war chief, an' —— will be to pay."

"Don't be too fast with that murder talk, Eutsler," Steve warned. "I'll take more from you than from most men because I know you mean well—but there's a limit. Now git it straight—I didn't kill this Siwash."

"Man, we just as good as seen you do it!" Eutsler exclaimed.

"How long has Ortega been with you?" Steve asked.

"What difference does that make?" the foreman asked.

"It makes just this much; that I'll stake my bottom dollar he killed Hogitşi."

Ortega did not turn a hair. He threw his leg over the saddle horn and appeared to meditate upon the subject.

"Ortega has been with me for an hour. You can't lay it on him," Eutsler remarked.

"But look, man, the blood is already beginnin' to dry," Steve pointed out.

"It naturally got thicker while we've been chewin' the fat," Eutsler maintained.

Steve stepped back to his horse and faced the two men.

"All right," he said bitterly, "you two are determined to hook this thing onto me—now let's see you take me in. I ain't goin' to stand no trial for murder with the dope against me like this."

"I ain't askin' no white man to stand trial for killin' an Injun, especially one as ornery as Hogitsi, though I've got my private opinion of any man that kills another when he's asleep. But you've raised —— enough on this outfit, so you can go to camp an' pack your war-bag. You're fired!" the foreman said.

"Not so fast, Mr. Eutsler," Ortega broke in quietly. "We haven't investigated this case thoroughly yet. I, personally, don't believe Steve killed this Indian."

"You don't! After him accusin' you of it!"

"That makes me think he was innocent. He must have thought there was some chance of me being the man or he wouldn't have made such a rash accusation."

"I'll be ——," Eutsler said helplessly.

"Why did you shoot when you found this man dead?" the Mexican asked Steve.

"None of your —— business," Steve replied curtly.

"I suspect," Ortega went on, unruffled, "that finding this Indian asleep you thought it would be a capital joke to scare him awake, so you fired."

"That's what happened," Steve admitted.

"Into the air, of course?"

"No I didn't. I shot into the ground six inches from his ear. If you don't believe it dig into the ground and find the bullet," Steve said triumphantly.

Ortega sprang to the ground and began digging with his pocket knife. In a moment he produced the blunted piece of lead which had been stopped by a small pebble just beneath the ground.

"You see, friend Steve was telling the truth," Ortega said.

"That don't prove nothin', nor clear up nothin'," Eutsler said stubbornly. "That bullet could have went clear through the Injun's head, an' Steve could have moved the head so's to make it look like that wasn't the bullet that done the business. Besides, if he didn't kill Hogitsi, who did?"

"You're sure a clear reasoner, ain't you?" Steve demanded sarcastically.

"I don't claim to be. I don't know whether you done this or not for sure, an' I don't much care. What I'm worried about is how the Injuns is goin' to take this. We'll keep it quiet, so come on away from here, an' let the Injuns do the wonderin'."

"Ain't you goin' to tell the Injuns?" Steve queried.

"I'm keepin' out of trouble," Eutsler replied sharply.

"Then I will," Steve said firmly.

"Don't do it—it'll mean more trouble," Eutsler said.

"You're not givin' me orders any more," Steve retorted.

He mounted his horse and plunged into the brush.

CHAPTER XII

KEBRO STATES HIS POSITION

ON HIS way to the Indian camp Steve had time to think of consequences. All his hopes, so bright the night before, of getting to be foreman, and marrying Jennie Gibbs had gone up in smoke because of his accidentally finding a murdered Indian. With Eutsler so firmly convinced of his guilt, Steve never doubted that Jennie also, would think him a murderer.

He was through with the Diamond M for good. At first it was his intention to pull out of the country, but as he cooled off he saw how impossible it would be. Jennie and her mother would be the ones worst hit, and with no one to depend upon but Eutsler he saw their finish. On their account he would stay in the country, and eventually settle with Ortega and the rest of the rustlers.

Working with Wild Pete would give him more freedom of action anyway. But first he had to break the news of the murder to the Indians, even though he knew it would be dangerous to himself, yet he felt instinctively that it was the right thing to do.

He rode into the cluster of teepees along a small, willow-lined creek. He had been there several times, and had been made welcome. He rode unmolested to a teepee which he knew housed his friend War-Jack and another young buck, one Schoolboy. A number of bucks were loafing in front of the teepee, but they were not throwing pebbles at a line drawn in the dirt, the Indian gambling game at which he usually found them indulging. Instead, they were talking moodily, with an evident undercurrent of excitement. He wondered if they had in some way already found out about Hogitsi.

"How," War-Jack alone greeted him.

"Howdy," Steve returned. "I want a talk with you, War-Jack."

The young buck walked silently to a spot fifty feet away. Steve dismounted and followed him. Briefly he told the Indian how he had found Hogitsi, including the fact that he had shot with the intention of waking him up. He knew the story would soon be out, and that it would be better for the Indians to hear it from his own lips.

"We go see Kebro," War-Jack said noncommittally.

He led the way to a more isolated teepee where the chief camped. On the way Steve saw his guide frown deeply, and following his gaze he also frowned.

On a little grassy place in the shade of the cottonwoods stood the Pecos Kid, smiling and smirking in a way that failed to make his face appear any pleasanter than usual. Before him was a pretty little Indian girl not over sixteen. She was showing the cowboy a number of beaded trinkets and buckskin gloves elaborately decorated with many colored beads worked in fantastic designs. The girl was blushing warmly, and occasionally giving the Kid a coy smile as he praised her workmanship.

Steve caught step with War-Jack.

"Who is the girl?" he asked.

"Kebro daughter—Nannibi," War-Jack replied in a tone that discouraged further questioning.

They found Kebro in conference with several Indians of mature age. All but Kebro eyed the cowboy with some hostility. The chief arose and said gravely—

"How."

"Howdy, chief," Steve returned matter-of-factly.

Somehow he had never been able to bring himself to speak the pidgin English usually adopted by white men with the Indians. He had learned that most of the Indians really knew more English than they pretended, and that their encouragement of the baby talk was for no other purpose than to put the other party at a disadvantage. He proposed to talk in his usual manner and let the Indians worry if they couldn't understand it. He was, however, always tactful in dealing with the red men's peculiarities.

War-Jack spoke a few words to Kebro, and at a word from the chief the other Indians disappeared. Then speaking in the native tongue, War-Jack repeated Steve's story. The chief arose and walked about in considerable agitation.

"Who kill—mebbe Eutsler?" he demanded of Steve.

"Nix. Eutsler is all worked up about it.

'Fraid it means more trouble. Don't blame it on him."

"Who kill?"

"Eutsler thinks I done it; but I found him just like I told War-Jack," Steve said boldly.

The chief gave him a long, searching glance.

"No," he said, "you no kill-um. You heap brave man. Me hear, all time, how you stoppum cattle—way down—Birch Packin' house."

"It was your medicine, chief," Steve said modestly.

"Injun heap think cowboy kill Hogitsi. Heap mad. Mebbe so cowboy ride along reservation—git killed. Me no want trouble. You tell Eutsler—white man's cattle git away—riders come here. War-Jack—Schoolboy—camp here all Summer. Cowboy come see-um—git back cattle. No see-um—git killed."

"That goes for me, too?" Steve asked.

"No, you my friend—you pack-um my medicine—heap safe."

Kebro muttered a few words to War-Jack, and the young Indian walked slowly over to where the Pecos Kid had bought everything Nannibi had for sale, and was trying to carry on a flirtation.

"Kebro see you," War-Jack said crisply, turning contemptuously on his heel, and returning to the teepee.

The Pecos Kid scowled blackly, but after a moment's hesitation followed War-Jack to the teepee. He gave Steve one frowning glance, but otherwise paid no attention to him, devoting himself to the business of gazing at Kebro defiantly.

Kebro, with folded arms, met the Kid with an expressionless stare which the Kid could not withstand. He dropped his eyes to the ground and crimsoned angrily.

"From now on you no come on reservation unless you lose cattle. Come here—you ketch-um cattle—git off," Kebro stated deliberately in a tone that left no room for doubt as to just how welcome the Kid was at the Indian camp.

Without a word the Pecos Kid went for his horse, then back to Nannibi to collect his purchases. He tied these in a bundle on his saddle, then swept the Indian village with a contemptuous glance. His eyes came back to the demure little Indian maiden at his side, and he licked his lips amorously. Without warning he seized the girl in his arms, and kissed her full upon the mouth. Releasing her, he leaped upon his horse, and was away in a cloud of dust before any one could move.

There was plainly no use to follow the Kid, and the Indians did not attempt it; but Steve knew that the Kid had destroyed his usefulness as a line rider by his precipitate action. This at least removed the necessity of having to watch him around the Diamond M camp, for the Kid made no attempt to conceal his dislike of Steve. Then Steve remembered with dismay that he himself, was no longer a part of the Diamond M outfit.

"Has a Mexican called Ortega been around here much?" Steve asked War-Jack.

"Uh-huh. Him come along Pecos Kid sometime," War-Jack said disinterestedly.

It was noticeable that the young buck's spirits had risen mightily since the Pecos Kid had been given his walking papers.

"Listen, War-Jack," Steve said earnestly. "If there's any more killin' s on the reservation let me know about it, will you?"

"Uh-huh," the Indian promised.

Then, after a moment's hesitation he said guardedly—

"Three hours ago—we find-um dead Injun—Nag-o-shoy. Killed all same Hogitsi. Injun heap sore—white man mebbeso git killed."

Steve now understood the reason for the soberness in the Indian camp when he arrived. The wonder was that he had not been attacked. He realized again just how much the friendship of the honorable old chief was worth. He saw that preparations were under way to get the body of the murdered Indian, so he quietly slipped away.

Three Indians brutally murdered in less than a month! What was back of it all, Steve wondered again and again. Could it be some degenerate with a grudge against Indians, or with a morbid craving to commit murder; or was it merely the incidental features of a deeply laid plot?

The latter theory was the one that appealed most strongly to the cowboy's reason. Convinced as he was that there was an organized effort to rustle cattle by the thousands, and that the Mexican, Ortega, was the real brains back of it, he saw in the killing, especially of the last two Indians, a cold-blooded attempt to keep the Indians hostile. Ortega's presence on the reservation, following the two

murders, removed the last doubt Steve entertained that he was the murderer of the Indian boy, Charley.

Yet there was nothing that he could do about it but to wait for more to happen. With the cloud over his own head it would do no good to announce his suspicions. To tell Wild Pete would almost certainly result in the death of the big Dane, who undoubtedly would run amuck. The only alternative left was to accuse Ortega face to face and shoot it out with him. For various reasons the time was not yet ripe for such action.

The riders were all in for the night when Steve arrived at the Diamond M camp. Besides the Diamond M men, Ortega and the Pecos Kid, Fred Fink was present with his understudy, Bill Cummins.

Their attitude showed plainly that they were awaiting Steve's arrival with something more than expectancy. He took in the careless but alert attitude of Bob Logan, and intercepted a look urging caution which Bob flashed him.

"Well?" Jack Eutsler asked grimly.

"Lovely day," Steve said sweetly.

"What'd them Injuns say?" Eutsler inquired sharply.

"Why don't you ask them?" Steve countered.

"Now see here—this is no time for foolishness. We want to know how they took it about Hogitsi gittin' killed."

"Didn't expect 'em to go crazy with joy over it did you?"

"What are they goin' to do about the cattle?" Eutsler persisted.

"The Pecos Kid could have told you that. Kebro says not to come on the reservation again without reportin' to War-Jack first. Later he amended that to the effect that Mr. Pecos Kid wasn't to do even that unless he expected to stop a few bullets."

All eyes turned to the Pecos Kid. Evidently he had not spread the news that he had been stirring up trouble. Steve noted that Ortega gave the Kid a look charged with menace—and wondered.

"I ain't afraid of the whole —— tribe of Injuns," the Pecos Kid sneered.

"I should say not," Fred Fink piped up. "Me an' the Kid an' Bill could wipe out that whole camp an' never know we'd been in a fight."

"Yes you could—if the Indians were hog-tied and blindfolded, an' you and Bill were where you could watch the Kid with a spy-glass! That's just as close as either of you would dare to get," Ortega said in a slow drawl, deliberately insulting, and so different from his usual manner that Steve had to look twice to be sure who was speaking.

Fink colored up, and withdrew into the background. Steve studied the Mexican intently for a moment. "Pose," he thought, "nothing but pose." Even the Mexican's clothes, plain, and devoid of ornaments, so unusual for a Mexican, convinced Steve that the man was purposely hiding his real personality.

"Tell me what Kebro said," Eutsler pleaded in genuine anxiety.

Steve gave the message the chief had sent, omitting only the part that had been strictly personal.

"Then there ain't no more danger than there was," Eutsler said, heaving a sigh of relief. "We'll be careful to stick to instructions, an' the feed is gittin' good now so the cattle won't bother so much."

"You ought to be able to retire to the ranch like you've been wantin' to," Steve threw out challengingly.

"I might," Eutsler said non-committally. "I'm goin' to the ranch to talk things over with the folks. Fink had just as well run both outfits."

"Don't forgit to get that man to take my place if you've fired Steve," Bob remarked.

"Never mind that, Eutsler," Steve countermanded. "Bob is just talkin'. He's goin' to stick."

There was that in his partner's eyes which silenced Bob, but when the visitors went to get their horses he contrived to drag Steve into the brush.

"What the —— are you drivin' at?" he demanded indignantly. "Do you think you can quit an' leave me here? I'm here to say you can't."

"That's where you're wrong, Bobby old dear. You're goin' to stay right here. We're not goin' to leave this outfit entirely unprotected."

"Still interested in this outfit's owner, eh?"

"More than ever," Steve confessed candidly.

"All right then—what's your plans?"

"I'm goin' in with Wild Pete where I can be my own boss, an' then I'll have

time to do what I want to. I can learn a lot more that I want to than I could workin' for Eutsler."

"That's dead right," Bob agreed, falling in with the pretense.

"By the way, what do they think about Hogitsi's murder?"

"Eutsler thinks you killed him, an' the rest agree except Ortega."

"—— that greaser!" Steve ejaculated fervently.

"I can't see why you got it in for him. He's always doin' you a good turn," Bob expostulated.

"I know; but he's a bloody, sneakin' murderer just the same. He's pretendin' friendship to throw us off our guard. If he can't use us some day we'll stop a bullet like Hogitsi."

"Imagination," Bob scoffed. "You ain't got no proof."

For the first time Steve related what he knew about the Indian boy's death.

"In all your roamin' around here have you seen any other Wineglass rider with a hair rope?" he concluded.

"No, I ain't," Bob admitted. "But still I can't believe it. Ortega ain't no ordinary greaser—he's more like one of them Spanish Grandees you hear about. He's nice as pie, an' all that; but he can be pizen mean in his talk when he wants to. You heard him call Fink down. Well, that ain't nothin' compared to what I've heard him say to Fink and Cummins. He's sure loaded to the guards with contempt for them two fellows, an' he ain't afraid to express it."

"Well, we'll see. You stick tight on the job, an' I'll play a free hand. Between us we'll git to the bottom of this business and beat it," Steve said.

"What about Jennie?" Bob asked curiously.

"I'm stayin' just to do the best I can for her, but after this affair is straightened up there's no use of my stayin' longer. My goose is cooked as far as she is concerned."

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLASS IN MARKSMANSHIP

ANOTHER three weeks passed rapidly by, but Steve, though he rode hard every day and covered practically the entire range, found nothing so wrong that he could definitely classify it. Every day he met riders belonging to the Wineglass, but few words passed between them. Twice he met Ortega, who was polite as usual, but Steve refused to enter into any extended conversation with him. Once he met Metcalf, but the foreman passed him by with an arrogant nod.

As the cattle were splitting up more and more, and staying out of sight in the timber a great deal, it was no longer possible for Steve to arrive at even an approximate estimate of their numbers. Besides this there seemed to be a great deal of unnecessary riding done. Bunches of cattle were driven here and there with no apparent reason unless it was to confuse any one trying to ascertain their condition.

Yet notwithstanding these obstacles Steve was reasonably certain that the cattle were decreasing in numbers day by day. This conclusion he reached principally because of a noticeable scarcity of one, two, and three year old steers and heifers. The rustlers were not operating in the usual way by making big, snappy hauls, but the cattle seemed continually to dwindle away.

From the first Steve had agreed with Wild Pete that the stolen cattle were being driven either northward to the Snake River valley, or southward toward Chub Springs, as quick disposal, the prime necessity in the rustling game, was impossible in any other direction. However, he made it a point to investigate the Squaw Creek trail over which his sheepherding friend, Al Young, had told him cattle were being driven. He fought shy of the Wineglass camps and looked up Young.

His first contact with Young was caused by his hearing a number of revolver shots at regular intervals. Impelled by curiousity Steve left his horse and moved up cautiously to the rim of a coulée from which the shots sounded. Young was methodically pulling a six-shooter from his holster, firing it as rapidly as possible, then putting the gun back and repeating the operation.

Steve watched him a few minutes, then whimsically reached for his own gun and sent a bullet whining over Young's head. He dropped behind a boulder, and a moment later a bullet zipped by close overhead. Steve laughed, ran back to his horse, and loped away, making a wide circle and coming back in sight of Young

who was legging it for camp. Steve waved his handkerchief three times according to the signal Young had told him to give. The sheepherder stopped and waited for Steve to ride up.

"Hello, Al," Steve sang out good-naturedly.

"Hello. Seen anything of a —— bushwhackin' skunk around here?" Young demanded.

"No. Somebody tryin' to bushwhack you?" Steve asked innocently.

"Sure was—but I come darn near gittin' him," the campmover bragged.

Steve laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

"You purty near got him, huh? Gee whiz, Al, you'd a come nearer hittin' me if you'd throwed a rock."

Young's mouth dropped open like the jaws of a steel trap.

"You! Was it you that shot at me?" he demanded.

"No, I never shot at you," Steve denied. "I just thought I'd better bust up your ambition to waste all them shells."

"I was practisin' gun throwin'," Young confessed with a grin.

"Goin' to be a gunfighter?" Steve jeered.

"Not at all; but I aim to be ready to defend myself if I have to. I ain't forgot that scrape a few drinks of booze got me into in Chub Springs that time, an' recently there's been plenty signs that a feller needs to be able to pull a fast trigger out here."

"How's that?"

"Ain't you heard?"

"Ain't heard nothin'."

"Two sheepherders has been found dead in the last ten days. One was shot while he was layin' down with his hat over his face, an' the other was roped and dragged to death."

"Good God!" Steve exclaimed, the exclamation not so much one of horror as at the striking similiarity of these murders with that of the Indians.

Plainly the killer was the same depraved individual, or individuals.

"That's why I'm practisin'," Young said simply.

"Say, Al," Steve said soberly, "I'm interested in lookin' over this end of the range right now. I ain't overly popular with the cow outfit that runs here, nor it with me, so what's the chance to board with you while I'm lookin' around?"

"You are sure welcome," Young said heartily, "but you're a queer duck of a cow-puncher to even talk to a shep like me."

"I'll give you a few lessons in gun throwin' that ought to speed you up about three hundred per cent," Steve promised.

He made good the promise and the dazed campmover at last realized that drawing and firing a gun was a fine art in itself, and not a mere matter of practise alone.

For three days Steve made his headquarters with Young, and during that time he got a better insight into the lives of the sheepherders than he had had before. They were not the morose type he had imagined, but were childishly pleased to talk to any one who would take the time to talk to them.

He found that every day there was a great deal of visiting going on among them. Each man had his horse, and while the sheep shaded up they visited back and forth. The word was quickly carried among them of what was going on at Young's camp, and to Steve's amusement he soon found himself conducting a regular class in marksmanship with six-shooter and rifle, though he found that many of the sheepmen were expert riflemen, a fact he was later to remember with the utmost thankfulness.

Steve's new friends reciprocated by helping him try to find the rustlers trail, but there were no results. Cattle of all brands were drifting back and forth through the Squaw Creek Pass, but if they were being worked the rustlers concealed the fact.

It was indeed true that the Wineglass outfit maintained a camp on the Blacksnake River at the extreme end of the Squaw Creek trail, but it seemed entirely proper for some of the thousands of cattle they ran were sure to get clear off the range unless some barrier was erected at that point.

Surprized and disappointed over his failure to achieve anything worth while Steve returned to Wild Pete's camp. The Dane was not surprized in the least.

"Metcalf an' the Mexican ain't leavin' no trails that you could pick up promiscuous just by ridin' over 'em. You've got to ketch 'em with the cattle," he delivered his opinion.

"I'll git 'em that way then," Steve said grimly.

But the ensuing days yielded no better returns. Try as he might Steve could get nothing definite on the rustlers. One night he returned to camp feeling more than usually blue and discouraged.

"That pardner of yours was here today," Wild Pete informed him. "Said to tell you to come over to the Diamon' M camp as soon as you could."

"Gosh, I've been wantin' to see old Bob for a long time, though I never thought of it before," Steve replied. "I'll ride over an' stay all night with the old-timer."

He changed horses and hurried over to the Diamond M camp, Wild Pete raising no objections.

In fact the big Dane allowed Steve perfect liberty of action, but still the cowboy sometimes regretted going in with him. As the days rolled by the Dane seemed to become more and more moody and reckless, and was frequently given to muttering threats of vengeance on the murderers of his boy.

It gave Steve a feeling of uneasiness regarding his partner-employer's mental condition, and it made it perfectly clear that the Dane was not to be trusted with the knowledge of the identity of the murderer. Steve knew that when the final reckoning came the issue must be settled by himself and Ortega, if the Mexican was finally proved to be guilty. That this would be the case Steve never doubted.

Steve found Bob, the Cross boys, and another Mormon lad, his own successor, sitting around the fitful gleam of a campfire at the Diamond M camp. They failed to see him until he rode up and shouted, "Hello."

His coming seemed to occasion no surprize.

"Turn your horse loose; we was lookin' for you tonight," Bob said calmly.

The Cross boys leaped to their feet, smiling from ear to ear.

"Lemme have your horse, an' I'll take him out to the cavy," Brig offered cordially.

"Had supper?" Heb questioned eagerly.

Steve was agreeably surprized. The Cross boys had not been any too friendly before.

"I am a little hungry," he admitted, releasing his horse to Brig.

Heb and the new boy went into the cook tent after grub, and Steve seized the occasion to ask Bob a few rapid-fire questions.

"Where's Eutsler?" he demanded first.

"At the ranch—has to stay there most of the time now that the irrigatin' season is on."

"What's struck the boys here to be so frien'ly?"

Bob grinned.

"It's on account of their bishop. He thinks he's gonna have the pleasure of baptizing you."

"Any more trouble with the Injuns?"

"Not much. War-Jack an' Schoolboy are fairish savages, an' we don't play aroun' much without 'em."

"Heard anything from the ranch?" Steve asked in a low voice.

"Thought that's what you'd git around to after while," Bob grinned. "That's why I went over to see you. Mrs. Gibbs is all excited over the rumor that you killed Hogitsi."

"Thinks I done it, huh?"

"I should remark the contrary. She come darn near firin' Eutsler for even suspicionin' you. That old lady simply can't believe that anybody she knows would do a thing like that. An' besides old Kebro was down there to git a bellyful of civilized grub, an' he told her you was far an' away the whitest white man that ever rode on the reservation. You've sure made a hit with that old savage."

"He's a good old cuss, an' a darn good friend," Steve said gratefully. "It makes a feller feel kinda good that there's people in the world like him an' Mrs. Gibbs."

"Are you goin' down there to see 'em?" Bob asked.

"I—I—reckon not."

Then, after a pause—

"Did you happen to see Jennie?"

"Yes—I seen her," Bob replied noncommittally.

"Well, what did she say, you measly old pelican?" Steve demanded in exasperation.

"Nothin'—only that she'd be liable to wring the neck offen you if you didn't show up at the ranch within twenty-four hours after I notified you," Bob said serenely.

CHAPTER XIV

A SHOT IN THE DARK

DESPITE his protestations that he was not going near the Gibbs ranch, the following forenoon found Steve riding up to the ranch house. His heart was in

his mouth and he dreaded in anticipation the ordeal of meeting the two women whom he felt that he had wronged someway in leaving their outfit in a pinch, even though he had left by request.

As usual the anticipation proved to be much worse than the fact. Mrs. Gibbs came out in the yard to meet him, and began to scold him roundly while he was yet twenty feet away; but it was a cheerful, heart-warming scolding—such a one as is never given to any but the closest friends. Steve found himself grinning, and throwing up humorous breastworks of defense at once. Which was precisely what the kind old lady intended to make him do.

"Never mind, young man, we've got your number—anybody that would run away and leave two unprotected women!" she charged laughingly.

"I didn't run away, I was fired away," Steve defended smilingly.

"That Jack Eutsler! Just imagine him thinking one of our boys would do a thing like that. I gave him a shaking for even thinking such a thing."

"It did look bad from his standpoint," Steve admitted.

"Jack thought he was doing right," a cool voice sounded from the doorway.

Steve pivoted and bowed awkwardly as Jennie came toward him with friendly, outstretched hand.

"We are glad to see you back on the ranch again," she said warmly, but not gushingly.

"I didn't suppose you folks would care about seein' me again," Steve said lamely.

"We didn't want to lose any good riders—and we planned to give you a better job later on," Jennie said.

"You talk to him, Jennie. My pies are in the oven," Mrs. Gibbs exclaimed, disappearing in the direction of the kitchen.

"Come in and sit down," Jennie invited, leading the way into the sitting-room.

Steve sank into a deep leather-covered chair almost up to his ears it seemed to him. There was no place he could put his hands, one spur caught a loose thread in the carpet, and he became thoroughly abashed.

"We want you to go back to work for us," Jennie began, ignoring the cowboy's embarrassment. "We know from what Chief Kebro told us that you can do more with the Indians than any one else, and you know that means a whole lot."

"But I——"

"Wait. The calf round-up will be starting in a few days and when that is over Jack will have to stay on the ranch to run the hay crew. He has been wanting to quit riding for a long time, and we think perhaps some one with more liking for the work might do better with the cattle. When the round-up is over we want you to be our cattle boss."

Steve gulped. This was a time he had looked forward to as an inconceivably happy moment. This seemingly blind faith in his integrity touched him as he had never been touched before—yet the moment was one of bitterness.

"There is just one thing, however," Jennie went on, "I am making a sort of bet on your judgment, and your getting the job depends upon your judgment being correct."

"What is that?" Steve managed to ask.

"You remember that you told me you would stake your reputation as a cattleman upon the fact that one-third of the cattle of the Wineglass outfit would be proved to be missing if a count should be made?"

"I did," Steve agreed.

"Because I have faith in you I am going to put it to the test. Mr. Walker is here now, and he was quite indignant when I suggested that he might be out some cattle. He says he knows they are all there, but he has agreed to have them counted at the calf round-up. If there is a shortage you get the job. If not——"

"Then I don't know a cow from a sheep," Steve declared.

"Then you'll take the job?"

"I can't," Steve said, and the girl never dreamed the effort it cost him to say it.

"But why? I surely thought you would help us out," Jennie said softly.

Steve at length forgot his embarrassment. He heaved himself out of the chair where he was so ill at ease, and leaned against a center table.

"Listen, Jennie," he said earnestly. "I don't want you folks to think I've throwed you down. I've really been workin' for you more since I quit than I was before. It's true I ain't accomplished anything yet, but I'm on the trail of the fellers that's doin' the rustlin' an' keepin' the Injuns

stirred up so's they can git away with it. You'll believe that won't you?"

"Certainly, Steve. I believed it when Bob told me that was what you were doing."

"Now then I can't take the job because I'm liable to be arrested for murder any day. I'm surprized that they ain't tried it before, an' I'll tell you straight—I'm not goin' to be arrested."

"If they'd been going to do that it would have been done before this," Jennie argued. "Chief Kebro will see that the Indians don't make any complaint, and Jack Eutsler will keep silent as the grave about it."

"But there's one other witness against me—Ortega. He'll be holdin' it over me all right, even if he don't dare make a complaint."

"But he insists that you are innocent. Surely you needn't worry about him," Jenny insisted.

Steve did worry, but he could find no good reason to advance for doing so. He dropped this line of defense and took up another.

"I have agreed to work for Wild Pete this Summer," he said.

"But you have been chasing rustlers more than you've been riding for him. I think your work with Wild Pete is something of a bluff," Jennie smiled.

"But I promised him—honest."

"Bob said Wild Pete offered to take you into partnership with him. Did you accept his offer?"

"Well, no, yes, er—that is," Steve fumbled, "I was to have a share of the profits if I stayed all Summer. But if I quit before I was just to git wages."

"Was that his proposal or yours?" Jennie asked relentlessly.

"Well, it was mine."

"Why?" she pressed.

"'Cause if I wanted to quit I could," the cowboy admitted.

Jennie knew that his reservation had been made to allow him to work for the Diamond M if he wished to, but she was not unkind enough to force him to admit it.

"Then you can accept our offer without breaking any agreement with Wild Pete," she pointed out. "There is no reason for you holding out longer."

The girl's insistence beat down his resolution not to be tied down to a routine job until the menace on the range was removed. He felt that it would be better for him to play a lone hand until all was cleared up, but as it was not to take effect at once there was a strong chance that the danger would be removed before the time arrived for him to take Eutsler's job. He was confident that the Spring round-up would bring on a final show-down.

"All right, Jennie. If the Wineglass cattle count out short I'll take the job," he promised.

"I'm glad," Jennie said with simple sincerity.

They at once began to talk of other things, and Steve felt rising within himself a surge of conscious power, and a renewed determination to win the girl of his dreams. True, the glamour of the moonlight was gone, but in its place was a friendly understanding unmarred by any hint of their relation as employer and employee. It seemed but a moment to Steve when Mrs. Gibbs stepped in to announce dinner.

Steve went to the bunk-house to wash up. When he returned to the dining-room he found Eutsler there, and with him a slender, superior-acting young man dressed in a hybrid mixture of Eastern and Western riding togs. Steve and the foreman exchanged slightly constrained nods of greeting.

"Mr. Walker, this is Steve Malty, the cowboy I was telling you about," Jennie introduced.

"Oh, this is the fellow who thinks I have lost all my cattle, is it?" Walker asked condescendingly, with the briefest of nods to Steve in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"You may not smile so if he is proved to be right," Jennie suggested.

"Pooh pooh; his assertions are ridiculous."

The Easterner dismissed the subject with an airy wave of his hand.

"Allow me to take you in to dinner," he said to Jennie, offering his arm.

Steve was completely nonplused. The grandiose manner of the Easterner "got him." In all the meals he had eaten there it had never occurred to him to offer Jennie his arm. She was there and perfectly able to walk, so why try to help her!

But when he saw Walker doing it he had no doubt that it was the correct thing to do. He blushed with remembrance of the times he had slouched down at the table

with no other thought than to eat, talk, and admire; nor did it strike him how sublimely ridiculous it would have been for him to have tried to act as Walker acted.

Walker's disdainful treatment of his opinion about the cattle he let go by. Had it occurred away from the house he would have tried to punch his head; but in the house he could do nothing. At least, he was sure of vindication when the cattle were counted.

During the meal Walker monopolized the conversation, with a few interjected comments from Jennie. Without saying so in words Walker made it felt that he was greatly amused over the eccentric custom of the hired men eating with the family. Before the meal was finished even Eutsler, who had practically been a member of the family for years, was gnawing his mustache in furious embarrassment. The men could not openly resent the stranger's patronizing manner though they were fully aware that it made them seem ridiculous.

Steve was supremely thankful when he at last got out in the open air, but Jennie and Walker followed him closely.

"I say, my man, what makes you think I am out some cattle?" Walker asked patronizingly.

"I think so because the cattle is missin'," Steve said lucidly, beginning to grow sulky.

Had Jennie not been present he would have answered more in detail—and with far greater emphasis.

"Metcalf will be amused when I tell him of this," Walker said.

"Now, Adrian," Jennie began, laying her hand lightly on the easterner's arm, "we don't want you to say anything about this until the cattle are counted."

"I see—rather take my cowboys by surprize is the idea."

"Exactly."

"But, my dear girl, you seem to think that if the rustlers knew we were onto them they might drive the cattle back. That would be a good joke on them and our young dreamer here, too," Walker snickered.

"Nevertheless I wish it to be kept quiet," Jennie said with a little asperity. "I have a right to ask it for the protection of our own outfit. The round-up will start at the reservation line and work south. You can have your men work your cattle ahead until you are ready to count them, and they must be held together. We don't want to take any chances on any of them being counted twice."

"All right, your will is law," Walker acquiesced humoringly.

Steve's fiery temper was rapidly getting the best of him, and he tried to get away; but Jennie called him back.

"Oh, Steve," she said, "there will be a dance at Clearfield tomorrow night, and you must come. Be sure to tell Bob and the Cross boys also. You remember you promised to attend some of the dances."

"A rustic dance!" Walker broke in. "That sounds interesting. I wonder if you will go with me to see it?"

"Why certainly—but not just to see it. I dance, Mister Man," Jennie said candidly.

"Well, I got to go," Steve said hastily, utterly unable to endure the Easterner longer.

He broke away abruptly, secured his horse from the barn and rode away.

Steve was in a deplorable state of despondency—made more acute by the sudden collapse of his hopes which had risen so unexpectedly when Jennie insisted upon his acceptance of the position of cattle boss. He was a fool, he told himself bitterly, to even think that a girl like Jennie would have sentimental feelings toward a common cowpuncher. She was plainly enamored of the glittering easterner, Steve thought, though he was convinced that Walker's glitter was of the tin foil variety, and not of the silver that the girl seemed to think.

In the cow country social circles in which Steve had moved it was tantamount to an engagement when a man asked a girl if he could take her to a dance and she accepted. Already he was well enough acquainted with Jennie to know that she was not bound by any narrow, provincial ideas, but the fact remained that by agreeing to go to a dance with Walker she was, for the time being at least, "keeping company" with him. If Steve, for instance, had been going to ask her to accompany him to a dance he would have led up to the momentous question with fear and trembling, and if she had accepted he would have considered himself well along on the path of courtship.

But Walker carried off everything easily

and with the calm assurance of one who knew exactly what to do. Steve now saw clearly how crude were his little bag of social tricks, and the knowledge was a bitter drink to swallow. There, alone in the sage-brush, his cheeks flushed with shame as he reflected that he had counted on the dances to give him an opportunity to shine in Jennie's eyes.

He thought of Bob Logan with increased respect. Bob had disdained the little social accomplishments that were available to men of his class, and was content to be entirely unpretentious; yet he was a man who always commanded respect. Still, Steve blindly failed to see that he himself, as far the big elemental things were concerned, was of far larger caliber than Walker, for all his suavity, would ever be.

Steve stopped in a moment at the Diamond M camp to tell the boys about the dance. Bob quickly saw that his friend's visit to the ranch had not produced the results he had hoped for.

"Goin'?" he asked Steve.

"Naw," Steve returned ungraciously.

"Who's takin' Jennie?" Bob inquired.

"The guy that thinks he runs the Wineglass."

Bob whistled.

"Funny place for him to be stayin'. Why don't he stay with his outfit, or else at Chub Springs?"

Steve made no comment. Too well he knew the reason. He had read it unmistakably in the looks he had seen Walker direct at Jennie, in spite of the Easterner's easy nonchalance. After talking a bit of range matters he rode on toward Wild Pete's camp, refusing the urgent solicitation of Bob and the Cross boys to stay over night, or at least to supper.

His conscience hurt him a little for having done so little riding for the big Dane, so he made a detour to look through a bunch of cattle for possible strays from the Summer herd. He found two short yearlings, the most difficult age, and the most difficult number to drive, and thus it happened that it was after dark when he reached camp.

Wild Pete, according to his custom, had eaten supper before dark, and had taken his roll of bedding somewhere into the brush to foil possible assassins. Steve was obliged to kindle a fire and cook his own sour-dough biscuits and beefsteak.

He squatted upon his heels with a frying-pan full of hot grease and steak in one hand, meditatively watching a simmering coffee-pot which was making vast but futile efforts to boil over. Suddenly, with a tiny volcanic effort the coffee-pot achieved its ambition, and a flood of amber liquid shot into the hot grease. The grease, in turn, spattered in every direction—considerable of it striking the cowboy in the face. With a startled oath Steve fell over backward. At the same moment there came the crack of a rifle, and a bullet bit into the dirt where Steve had been squatting.

He rolled quickly out of the danger zone that was lighted by the fire, and sent several shots in the direction from which the bullet had come. He quickly realized that the would-be murderer with the rifle was too far away for his six-shooter to do any damage. Suddenly there sounded a bellow like that of an enraged bull, and a crashing of bushes—the signal that Wild Pete had gone into action.

Steve ran as fast as he could, keeping parallel to the course he could hear the Dane taking. His only fear now was that the assassin would stop long enough to waylay the noisily plunging Dane. At times he could hear a man running in front. Evidently he had left his horse some distance away so that the animal might not betray his presence. Steve redoubled his efforts in the hope of overtaking the man before he reached his horse.

Then he heard a horse pulling back on a rope, and he deduced that the man had burst upon it suddenly giving the animal a scare. He stopped and listened and his trained ear told him that the man was having trouble getting up to his horse.

Steve broke into a run again, and then he heard the pursued break out with a string of lurid, Spanish profanity. A moment later he heard the swish and cut of a quirt, and he realized that the man had made his escape down a coulée.

Wild Pete had lost the trail and gone off in another direction. Steve went despondently back to his ruined supper, and in a few minutes the Dane joined him.

"Do you know who that was?" Steve asked curiously.

"No I don't, but I've a mind to tie you up to a tree an' give you a quirtin' like I did them Wineglassers for bein' so —— careless," Wild Pete said irritably.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROUND-UP

TWO days before the Spring, or calf round-up was to begin, Steve moved his string of horses over to the Diamond M camp. Despite his despondency over his failure to get a definite clue as to the operations of the rustlers, and his even deeper pessimism concerning the ascendency of Walker with Jennie, he felt a thrill of exultation as he saw the preparations for the round-up being made.

In addition to the excitement, wild humor, and violent quarrels always incident to a round-up, this one he knew would be more than usually exciting because the count would force the rustlers to a showdown, or force Metcalf to an acknowledgment of hopeless inefficiency. Certainly the overbearing Walker would be discomfited. And after it was all over there would be the long-coveted foreman's job. At the thought of it Steve's depressed spirits skyrocketed buoyantly. Who could tell? There was always the possibility that the cards would fall his way some time.

He was welcomed at the Diamond M camp quite as though he belonged there. Even Eutsler went so far as to ask Steve to add Sitting Bull to the string of horses which had been furnished by Wild Pete—an offer which Steve gratefully accepted. Wild Pete had ordered him to "rep" during the round-up, while he, Pete, attended to the herd, keeping as many of them as possible within the big bend of the river.

The big chuck wagon from the Diamond M ranch arrived, bearing the Mormon elder who was to assist Heb Cross in cooking for the layout until it was taken over by the Wineglass outfit.

Farmers, men and boys mounted on decrepit ponies, or heavy-boned work horses, who had a few cattle scattered promiscuously on the range, began to arrive. There was no joy in store for them and they knew it, for they were destined to be the "goats" of the round-up. Their horses would be objects of amusement to the well-mounted cowboys. They would be forced to stay back at the rodeos until every one else was finished, and when they were finally permitted to look through the herd for their dogeys they would be accused of trying to steal the poor creatures which wore their brands and earmarks.

Many times, too, they would be completely bluffed out of claiming their own animals. Their nights would be made hideous by a continuous succession of rough practical jokes. Wet lasso ropes would be dragged across their sleeping faces to the accompaniment of cries of "snake." Their beds, with them inside, would be dragged through creeks, and over boulders, and in the morning they would be "cussed out" by the boss of the round-up because they were not ready to start riding with the rest at daylight, and the delay would be caused by missing cinches, stirrups, or bridle reins taken off and hid by enterprising cowboys.

A dozen riders from other outfits lower down, or across the Blacksnake, arrived to rep for their respective outfits. The next to arrive was a sizable Indian village—a round-up being a thing the Indians never missed. There was always some cattle killed accidentally which meant free beef for them, and the Indians dearly loved the wild riding and roping stunts which would be pulled off almost continuously.

Steve at once rode over to their camp to call on Chief Kebro, War-Jack, and Schoolboy. He found them as usual, friendly.

"Heap big workboy—who ketch-um?" Kebro inquired.

"Gosh, I never thought to ask. I'll ask Bob," Steve said.

With Kebro's question in mind Steve at once hastened to ask Bob who was to be the boss of the round-up.

"Fink is to run it until we reach Bear creek, an' after that Metcalf will take charge," Bob informed.

"Eutsler was eliminated, huh?"

"Looks like it—though it don't cut no ice since the higher-ups are to be with us in person," Bob said with a suggestion of a grin.

"Meanin'?"

"The yahoo from New York, an' Jennie Gibbs."

"You mean Jennie is come out here to stay with that—that——"

"Not with him, or because of him that I know of; but she an' a couple of schoolgirl friends, an' Bishop Compton's daughter are bringin' a camp outfit an' are aimin' to foller the round-up."

"Well—I'm a sucker!" Steve gasped.

"They're just out for an outin' they say, but 'tween you'n me I think Jen is out here to watch them cattle bein' counted. I got

an idee that she's plumb anxious to see your guess verified, an' she's afraid the tenderfoot will try to doublecross her. I think she'd like to see that bird take a fall."

"Aw go on," Steve scoffed. "She calls him Adrian."

"What you expect you poor boob—her to call him by his whole handle? She calls me Bob an' you Steve. That don't mean nothin'."

Although discounting Bob's optimism about fifty per cent. Steve always felt better after a talk with his pal. He was really pleased when he saw the buckboard containing the girls' camping outfit arrive. As an expert and fancy cowboy he knew that he was second to none, and the round-up would afford him an opportunity to shine in Jennie's eyes.

Yet when the four girls rode up on their horses, accompanied by Walker, Steve could not muster courage to speak to them. The three strange girls were obviously out for a glorious time, and Walker kept close to Jennie all the time. Steve didn't care to risk comparison with Walker as an entertainer, so he pretended to be very, very busy.

Ortega was the first member of the Wineglass outfit to arrive. He came in with his private string of six horses—far and away the best horses on the range, especially the one he was riding, a tall, rangey gray he called Freckles.

Steve watched the Mexican intently. He wondered vaguely if Freckles was the horse which had caused his master to betray himself by speaking Spanish the night he had tried to assassinate him by Wild Pete's campfire.

The time was rapidly drawing near, he felt, when things would come to a climax between himself and the Mexican. He rather expected a change of attitude on the part of Ortega, but he was wrong. The Mexican was as urbane, as courteous as ever. In fact he seemed to have developed a genuine fondness for Steve, and in spite of his reluctance the latter found himself replying with more than usual politeness, though he never relaxed his vigilance. Yet he had to admit that as a cowpuncher the Mexican was head and shoulders above the rest. He was the first man Steve had ever worked with whom he doubted his ability to best.

The round-up started off smoothly. Fink, as range boss, designated the territory, or circle to be covered that day. The men were paired off two by two, the top hands on the best horses being assigned to make the longest ride, called riding the outside circle. Thus it happened that Steve, riding Sitting Bull, was paired with Ortega on Freckles.

Nothing happened, however, except that fresh fuel was added to the flame of Steve's resentment because Sitting Bull, wonderful horse that he was, was proven to be inferior to Freckles in speed and endurance. Thereafter Steve kept Sitting Bull for a cutting out horse, and he longed for a chance to test the skill of himself and the horse against the Mexican. It was to come to him under dramatic circumstances.

By keeping in touch with each other the riders covered the ground as thoroughly as though a fine-toothed comb had been dragged over it. Nothing was permitted to escape. The cattle were hurried along to a designated spot where the rodeo was to be held.

In the meantime the chuck wagon was moved to this spot, and by the time the cattle were gathered dinner would be ready for the famished riders. After dinner the arduous, complicated work of cutting out the cattle began; the top hands doing the cutting out, and the remainder holding the big herd, or the smaller ones belonging to each outfit as they began to take shape. After this the branding.

Usually the cattle were turned back on the range which the round-up had already covered so that there would be no danger of them being gathered again. But this time, pursuant to orders given by Walker, the Wineglass cattle were held in a bunch which was to be increased day by day until they were all rounded up.

Steve and Bob were keenly alert to see how the Wineglass men took Walker's orders. At first it seemed as if they would be totally ignored. Metcalf failed to show up during the first forenoon, so Walker ordered Dutch Jake to get a bunch of men and hold the Wineglass cattle together. At once his lack of authority over the men became apparent.

"I'm repin' on the round-up now, an' I take my orders from Fink," Dutch Jake refused surlily.

Highly incensed, Walker hunted up Ortega, the Mexican's politeness perhaps leading him to think he would prove more tractable.

"My man, I wish you to ride to Mr. Metcalf's camp and tell him I wish to see him here at once," Walker ordered.

"Your pardon, Mr. Walker, but just at present I am very busy. I must look after the cattle I represent. You know the D bar cattle are still in my charge," Ortega said sweetly.

Walker hunted up Jennie and her girl friends.

"Metcalf is not here, and these men refuse to obey my orders," he complained.

"Send a man for Metcalf," Jennie advised promptly.

"None of them will go."

"I thought you were running this outfit," Jennie laughed.

"Of course the men don't respect my immediate authority, but when Metcalf arrives I'll see that I am obeyed."

"I don't care how you enforce your orders —but I want the cattle counted," Jennie said implacably.

"They shall be," Walker promised, eager to please. "And are you going to count your own cattle?"

"Not all of them. We haven't men enough, but we can get a line on ours by keeping count of the calves branded," Jennie explained.

Walker again rode away in search of a man to send for Metcalf. He picked out a meek-looking farmer boy astride a workhorse as being the least liable to make opposition.

"See here," Walker said sternly, in his most authoritative tone, "I want you to go to the Wineglass camp and tell Mr. Metcalf to come here at once."

"Nix," the boy refused flatly. "You don't git me to go around that outfit alone."

Walker hurried from one rider to another questing in vain for a messenger, but they all either pointedly refused, or made shifting excuses.

Meantime Jennie sought out Fink.

"Mr. Walker wants to see Metcalf, and he can't find a man that will go for him. Will you send one?" she inquired.

Fink, who resented Walker's familiarity with Jennie as much as Steve did, asked irritably—

"Why can't the stiff go himself?"

"He doesn't know the way—and we don't want to stop the round-up to organize a search party," Jennie smiled.

"I'll send a man for Metcalf for you, Jen, but I won't do it for Walker. Want me to?"

The inner meaning of the man could not be mistaken. Jennie flushed, but she showed her real strength by repressing her irritation, and saying calmly, "Send for him."

"Bill, go git Metcalf," Fink ordered his ever-ready handy man.

Metcalf, aloof and austere, arrived just as the men began cutting out the milling cattle in the first rodeo. Walker hurried up to the foreman and shook hands effusively. Metcalf made no display whatever. His roving eyes played over the Easterner indifferently for a moment, then strayed back to the cattle.

"Metcalf, I would like to have all our cattle held together until the round-up is over so they can be counted," Walker instructed.

"Afraid I've lost some?" Metcalf stated rather than questioned.

"Not in the least," Walker denied. "But there have been foolish cowboys talking, and in justice to you as well as the stockholders such rumors should be set at rest."

"That'll be some order do you know it? I'll have to get more men, an' holding those cattle together that way will knock off a good many pounds of beef."

Walker might have weakened, but he found Jennie's eyes upon him and he dared not turn back.

"I'll assume the responsibility," he said loftily. "Count them."

"All right. I'll keep 'em together, an' when the whoop-up is finished we'll count 'em."

Metcalf flashed a hard look toward Bob Logan who had been crowding close to them under pretense of disciplining his horse.

"Some of these punchers around here are gittin' to think they know too much," he said to Walker, ostensibly referring to the unknown cowboy who was spreading the rumors they were discussing.

Bob however, read a threat in the remark.

"I have given Metcalf my orders, and they will be obeyed," Walker bragged to Jennie to bolster up his dignity which he realized had been slightly damaged by the events of the morning.

At the same time Bob was edging close to Steve where they were helping the other riders hold the herd while the Wineglass riders cut out their stuff.

"Metcalf's been told to count," Bob said quietly.

"What'd he say?" Steve asked quickly, feeling a thrill at any sign which indicated the approach of the crisis.

"Swallered his medicine without much grumblin'—now. But he's got that Eastern swell plumb hoodoo. Metcalf figures he can slip anything he wants to over on him."

"What d'ye think, will they try to pull a crooked count, or just bluff it out?" Steve asked.

"They'll bluff it out, or some fine mornin' in the next week they'll all show up missin'. That is if they happen to be rustlers like you think."

CHAPTER XVI

STEVE GETS A TAIL-HOLD

FOR a week the round-up continued much in the usual manner, except that it was tamed down to a certain extent by the presence of the girls. Steve held aloof from the crowd that usually surrounded them, letting Walker and Fink fight it out for Jennie's favor. He knew that they occasionally made fools of themselves by their irritation at each other, and the knowledge made him smile, although he did not suspect that his own conduct was earning for him a reputation for sullenness.

One afternoon Jennie sought him out alone.

"Well, cowboy," she asked, "still bearing the whole weight of the round-up on your shoulders?"

"Naw, I ain't takin' it as serious as all that," Steve objected.

"I thought you were—you're attending so strictly to your own business. Or are you just sulking?"

"Sulkin'? Me?"

"You haven't spoken to me for a week," she charged.

"It looked like you was havin' a good time," he defended weakly.

"Do you think that's what I am out here for—just to have a good time?" she demanded.

Steve remained speechless.

"It looks to me," Jennie went on, "that you might tell me once in a while how things are going; especially in view of the fact that I am backing your prediction that there will be cattle missing, and nobody else seems to believe it."

"I sure appreciate it," he maintained.

"I still believe you will be proved right, but our calf count is up to par. Making allowances for the few the reps will get on other ranges we will brand about forty per cent. of the whole number. That doesn't look like we were out many. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

Again Steve was on safe conversational footing.

"That's all right," he explained, "but it's a darn poor way to keep count if you ask me. The rustlers ain't grabbin' cows an' calves yet. It's just the big stuff they want now. Undoubtedly they figured on a full calf count to give 'em a free hand until Fall, an' by that time what's left won't be worth takin'."

"It seems too big a thing to be possible. If you are right you are sure a wonder," she said half unconsciously.

"It's the leader of the rustlers who is the wonder to git away with a thing like that," Steve objected.

Jennie's eyes were straying idly over the mass of cattle in the rodeo. Suddenly she saw something that aroused her interest.

"What's up, I wonder? There seems to be some excitement over there," she remarked.

Knee to knee they rode into a lane formed by the different bunches of cattle. As they rode up they heard Brig Cross say angrily to Metcalf—

"That calf belongs to Bishop Compton."

"None of yer lip, you —— Mormon, that critter belongs to a rancher down around Chub Springs that asked me to look out for his stuff. Take that calf back to our bunch, Ortega," the Wineglass foreman ordered.

White with anger at what was plainly barefaced robbery Steve spurred Sitting Bull to a leap which placed him squarely between the calf and the Wineglass band. His right hand cuddled the butt of his gun, and he expected nothing but to have to shoot it out with Ortega, and possibly with Metcalf. Although the crisis had come quicker than he expected or wished, it filled him with a sort of savage gladness that the hour had arrived.

They were the two most skilful riders among the fifty or more present, and the best mounted. No sooner had Steve turned the calf than the Mexican's horse, Freckles, was directly in front of it. It was turn and turn again. Each man kept his intelligent horse headed always toward the band to which he wished to drive the calf, nor did

either horse need assistance from its rider. Each knew where the calf should go.

At times the calf seemed to go under the belly of one of the horses and it looked as if it would get behind, but each time the horse would whirl on its hind legs with terrific speed, its front legs clearing the calf's back and coming down pat directly in front of the dodging calf, sending it back toward the other rider.

Everybody, including Metcalf and Brig Cross, had withdrawn to one side to be out of harm's way. Each instant Steve expected the Mexican to make a break toward his gun, but Ortega only sat his horse loosely and smiled. As an exhibition of skill it was superb. Not a man present but who knew that he would lose the calf in less than a minute to either of them.

Steve began to grow furiously angry at the deadlock. He dared not take down his rope for that would make him an easy victim to the Mexican's gun. He could not outpoint his adversary, and Ortega persistently refused to give him a chance to fight. A wave of hot anger stabbed into his brain, and he impulsively reached down and grabbed the bewildered calf by the tail, leaving his bridle reins trailing over his arm. His right hand refused to let loose of the gun.

The calf let out a startled bawl and tried desperately to break loose. Sitting Bull, with the memory of his outlawry still fresh upon him, in turn bawled with fright, stuck down his head and began to buck. But Steve had a death grip and refused to be jarred loose.

Each time Sitting Bull rose in the air the calf was swung from its feet, and its frightened bawling only added to the horse's terror. Steve, expert rider that he was, quickly realized that he had taken in too much territory. He could not ride the bucking horse, hold the calf, and watch the Mexican. The one thing easiest to do he would not do if the whole Wineglass outfit began to shoot.

He would deliver that calf to the band where it belonged. He quit watching Ortega, dropped his gun back into the holster, and gathered his reins in his right hand. Then, with tremendous difficulty, he succeeded in guiding the bucking broncho to the Clearfield bunch of cattle, and allowed the calf's tail to slip from his almost paralyzed hand with a gasp of relief. He controlled Sitting Bull and rode back to where Ortega was calmly sitting his horse.

"Still want to take that calf?" Steve asked belligerently.

"You're welcome to it," Ortega said briefly.

"What the ——!" Metcalf blustered. "You goin' to let him bluff you like that?"

"He's earned that calf whether it belongs to him or not; but if you want it—go and get it," Ortega said curtly.

Metcalf half started, changed his mind, and called to the Pecos Kid—

"Kid, go git that critter."

The Pecos Kid, with a malignant stare at Steve, started promptly for the calf, his hand openly caressing the handle of his six-shooter. In quick imitation Steve leaped to head him off, his eyes closed to mere slits. He saw the Wineglass forming in a line beside Metcalf, and heard the cattle boss murmur—

"That's the guy that's been accusin' us of rustlin'."

The same moment Steve saw Bob Logan hurrying into the danger zone, and, what filled him with a heroic exultation, was Jennie Gibbs riding beside him.

Quick as he was to confront the Pecos Kid, Ortega was even quicker. The Pecos Kid half jerked his gun from its holster, and scowled evilly at the Mexican.

"Put it back," Ortega commanded curtly.

The Pecos Kid hesitated a moment, then allowed the gun to slip reluctantly back, as if his hand was impelled by a more powerful mind than his own.

"Metcalf," the Mexican began, his voice sounding so softly as to be almost a purr, "you are a dirty, cowardly sneak. You are yellow clean to the bone. You've bluffed about what a gun-fighter you are—but no one ever saw you in action. If you're not yellow ride out from the crowd and shoot it out with me—you know what for."

The foreman chewed his mustache viciously, while his roving eyes flashed here and there over his men. None of them cared to volunteer to take his place, but all watched him expectantly. Still, they were behind him solidly, and the tigerish Pecos Kid crouched ready to commit murder. In front were only Steve, Bob, Ortega, and Jennie. For a moment it seemed that he would give a signal to his men. However, when his eyes roved back to the laconic Mexican lolling in his saddle, but with his

hand hovering above his gun with deadly intentness, he hesitated. Suddenly he attempted a laugh.

"What's wrong with you, Ortega? There's no use makin' all this rumpus about a —— dogey calf. Let the thievin' Mormons have it. We don't want no trouble—especially with ladies within range."

"Never mind that part of it, Mr. Metcalf," Jennie spoke up dryly. "I'm just a cattlewoman, and I'm here to stick with my friends. All these people back here are my neighbors and they have been losing cattle long enough."

"The ladies have great influence—especially with Ortega," Metcalf insinuated.

The Mexican bowed.

"Always," he agreed. "Your loyalty to your neighbors, Miss Gibbs, does you great credit; but your strong character would not allow you to skulk in the background—like Mr. Fink for instance."

Fink, just riding up with Bill Cummins, flushed hotly.

"I'm always ready to back my friends, but I don't see no call to help out that —— partner of Wild Pete's," he growled.

Jennie gave him a look electric with contempt, which withered him. He fell back and began to get busy with his cattle, and on the instant everyone else got to work about their business.

Steve went into the herd and began cutting out Diamond M cattle like a demon. Bob and Eutsler, who had been doing that work, got out of his way and let him go. He never remembered being so happy, or so proud of his own judgment. Though refusing to try to shine in the disconcerting presence of Walker his own opportunity had come and he had met it nobly.

He was sure that he had made a hit with Jennie, for she herself had come into the affair like the dead game sport she was. This, together with his coming vindication when the Wineglass cattle were to be counted, made it necessary for him to work off some of his exuberance of spirit. Hence he became at once top hand for the Diamond M, quite forgetting that he was no longer on its payroll.

One problem, however, still troubled him. That was the strange attitude of Ortega. Why did the man who plainly was not afraid of the most violent gunmen always seek peace with him, and then make treacherous attempts to assassinate him in the dark? Why did Ortega seek trouble with Metcalf and the Pecos Kid, or was it all clever acting?

He would have thought it the latter were it not for the undeniable fear pictured on Metcalf's face when the Mexican accused him of being yellow. That the foreman was yellow at heart Steve had shrewdly suspected since the first time he had seen the man—the night in Chub Springs when he had tried to have Wild Pete murdered.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COUNTING

THE round-up crossed Bear Creek and swung around the head of Devil Creek in a wide semicircle. This was the signal for the departure of the girls. Jennie did not care to remain with it now that it was on the exclusive territory of the Wineglass. Before leaving, however, she had a final interview with Steve. He saw her coming and his eyes opened with admiration at the pretty picture she made on her dancing bay pony.

"Gee, you're a sight fer sore eyes this mornin'," he offered smilingly.

"Am I?" she said absently.

"I don't see how you keep lookin' so fresh an' purty out in all this dust and wind, but you do. Just look at me!"

He grinned and ran a deprecating hand over a four days' growth of bristly red whiskers looming up in vivid contrast with his black, curly hair.

"Round-ups are hard places to keep looking respectable," she assented. "When this one is over and the count is made I want you to come to the ranch. We'll want you to start being foreman at once."

"That is if the count pans out the way I think," he added.

"Yes. But since the events of yesterday I am more than ever sure that you are right," Jennie said.

"Who is goin' to make that count?" Steve asked. "If it's either Metcalf or Ortega nobody can be sure it's right."

"Adrian is going with me, but he will be back in time to make the count with them. But I want you to be there also. Will you?"

"I sure will—if I'm livin'," Steve promised heartily.

"Steve, be careful," the girl urged in a softer tone than she had yet spoken to him, "and don't think because I seemed to be

trying to get you into a fist fight once, and seemed to encourage a gun fight yesterday that I want you to risk getting hurt."

"Gee, Jennie, you're the kind of woman I like—one that's got the nerve not to be scared by a little blood, an' can take life the way it comes like a man."

"It's not that," she denied hurriedly. "It's simply that I have been raised on a cattle ranch and know cowboys. When I suggested that you fight Cummins it was to prevent worse trouble later on. And yesterday I was sure that Metcalf would not dare start anything with so many people present, so I figured it was better to bluff them out while the bluffing was good."

"If you was bluffin' when you rode in there alongside Bob the poker profession sure lost a darn bright ornament," Steve maintained.

"One thing bothers me, though," Jennie cut in quickly. "That is the attitude of Mr. Ortega. I can't reconcile his actions with your suspicions at all."

"I can't either," Steve confessed, "but don't you go to gittin' fooled by him. If he ain't in cahoots with Metcalf in rustlin' it's a safe bet that Metcalf is straight and Ortega the man behind the gun."

Just then Walker rode up and claimed Jennie. Steve glared after the Easterner angrily as they rode away, all the old fear called back by Walker's calm air of proprietorship.

Eutsler detracted from Steve's peace of mind by sending Bob and the Cross boys back to camp to ride line while he remained to rep with the Wineglass. This left Steve practically friendless as far as the white cowboys were concerned; a condition not at all to his liking in view of the hostility now openly shown him by Metcalf and his men.

Several times Ortega made friendly advances which Steve evaded as much as he could without forcing an issue. There was no doubt in his mind that the Mexican had for the time being abandoned his attempts to kill him, and was laying some deep scheme to use him for his own purposes. Steve believed himself clever enough to thwart any such plan the Mexican might conceive, and he perceived that it was to his advantage to accept the protection which the man always seemed ready to offer. The Pecos Kid, Sawtooth, and Dutch Jake were particularly vicious, and Steve was well aware that it was only the dominating personality of Ortega which prevented them from attacking him.

Another thing which made him feel a little more secure than he otherwise would have done was the presence of Chief Kebro's camp of Indians. Only a few of the younger bucks rode with the cowboys, but War-Jack stuck as close to Steve as a brother. This friendship however, threatened to demand payment in advance. War-Jack was deeply in love with Kebro's girl, Nannabi. While Jennie and her girl friends were present they made much of the pretty little Indian girl and her fancy beadwork and she was unmolested by any of the cowboys.

But no sooner were they gone than the Wineglass riders began to flock around her. Then, like coyotes scattering before the approach of a wolf, they left her, and the Pecos Kid began to force his attentions upon her in the face of the open hostility of the Indians, and at the same time he began a series of petty persecutions of War-Jack.

The unavoidable clash came one evening just when the herders of the Wineglass cattle were being relieved. War-Jack was afoot at the time. The Peocs Kid swung on to his horse and with a taunting laugh remarked—

"Time for me to go see my little squaw."

War-Jack held up his hand dramatically.

"You no go Injun camp," he said sternly.

With a swift underhand throw, the Pecos Kid shot out his lariat and dropped it neatly around the Indian's neck. For just a moment the Kid looked venomous enough to tighten the rope until it strangled, but the look passed and he allowed the rope to go slack for the Indian to throw it off.

War-Jack could easily have lifted it off, but the act would have been incompatible with his dignity. Instead, he slowly drew his knife and slashed the rope, leaving the hondo and several feet of the noose lying at his feet.

The Pecos Kid looked murderous, but as deliberately as War-Jack he doubled up the rope until it was in several coils seven or eight feet long. Riding up to the Indian he said smoothly—

"War-Jack, I'm goin' to learn you how to take a joke."

Crash! The heavy hard twist descended upon the Indian's head and brought him to the ground on all fours. But War-Jack was not the kind to stay supine and take a beating; his open knife was still in his hand, and as gracefully as a cat he sprang from the

ground and seized the Kid's saddle-horn with one hand, holding on tenaciously while he slashed ferociously at the Kid. The first few blows did scarcely more than cut through the heavy leather chaps, but one cut the Kid's gun hand to the bone as he tried to loosen the Indian from the saddle-horn.

The bucking horse at last dislodged War-Jack, and the young buck remained immovable in his tracks. Steve, who was one of the spectators, expected to see the Pecos Kid try to kill him, and prepared to prevent it; but the Kid had no more heart for fighting, being busy with his cut hand and almost crying over it.

"Kill the —— Injun," a chorus of yells instantly arose.

Steve swung his gun to a level with the top button of Metcalf's vest.

"Call 'em off, Metcalf," he said calmly, "or I'll drill you."

"Don't monkey with the Injun, boys; we don't want to have no truck with 'em," he ordered obediently but ungraciously.

The men obeyed with the same measure of sullenness. For some time thereafter Steve caught occasional sarcastic remarks concerning Metcalf's courage, and he gathered that the cattle boss had been a greatly feared man until the two showings-up he had received on this round-up. Steve smiled. He was not at all averse to having the leaders losing their authority, although Metcalf's suddenly disclosed weakness added conviction to his surmise that Ortega would in the end prove to be the master spirit.

After this fracas the Pecos Kid kept at a distance from Nannabi, but when she happened to be around the rodeo he watched her with an expression that was far from pleasant. Steve and War-Jack, noting it, were nevertheless unworried for the immediate present as the Kid was obliged to keep his right hand in a roll of bandages, and he was not a two-gun man, being too fast and clever with his right hand to risk any divided attention by trying to use another gun. This indeed being the policy of Steve, Ortega, and any of the rest who were really dangerous with a gun.

After this incident things moved calmly enough for the remainder of the round-up. The great herd of the Wineglass grew in size until it required almost all their man power to handle it; the men working in four-hour shifts. Steve, eagerly watching, knew beyond a doubt that his suspicions were correct. Obviously the cattle were not there. Yet he held his peace, for he knew that he would be scoffed at for intimating that anything near a correct guess could be made with such a herd. But though he watched, he knew that he was being watched in turn. At night he tore a leaf from Wild Pete's book—being careful to move his bed once or twice after it became dark.

The last day of the round-up arrived, and with it came Walker, supercilious as usual to all but Metcalf. And strangely enough he alone seemed to be dominated by the cattle boss. Metcalf's grip on the rest of the men was visibly shattered, and as a consciousness of it oozed into the foreman he became more and more disagreeable.

The round-up finished on the top of a rolling plateau south of the head of Devil Creek. It had once been volcanic, and its comparatively smooth surface was occasionally broken by conical shaped hills and boulder strewn ridges thrown up in some prehistoric eruption. Little bunches of quaking aspens, and dwarf mahogany grew where the erosions of time had left pockets of soil deep enough for them to obtain a foothold.

Metcalf had given orders that the herd was to be held one more night, and then it was to be strung between two of the knolls which footed together where the count could be made, and pass on northward back to the range.

Steve was speculating upon the probable result of the disclosure of the shortage when his attention was distracted by a commotion among the men. All the riders of the Wineglass except the shift that was holding the herd was present.

"Well, Metcalf, who's goin' after the booze?" Steve heard a rider ask.

"Nobody. There won't be no booze this trip," Metcalf replied shortly.

"What?" shouted the man, his jaw dropping. "A whoop-up finished an' no booze! Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"I said no booze—and that goes," the foreman repeated with deliberation.

"Hear that, fellers?" the puncher addressed his fellows. "He says there ain't to be no booze. Whoever heard of a whoop-up endin' like that?"

It appeared to Steve that Metcalf's authority over his men was due for a final testing.

"I move that a couple of us go to Chub Springs an' git a case of whisky, an' a couple of kegs of beer, an' charge it to the outfit," the cowboy said loudly.

"Try it," Metcalf said coldly, but with a hint of desperation in his voice. "This outfit has got to keep sober."

"Mebbe not," the man leered.

It was nothing but a direct challenge.

"The first man that starts to leave here will get shot," Metcalf accepted the challenge.

The men were plainly at a loss what to do. There was no doubt but that the majority was against the boss, but they could hardly begin hostilities unless they started away—and that would put them at a disadvantage.

"You heard me," Metcalf snapped, quick to follow up his advantage.

The Peocs Kid, with his hand unbandaged, and his evil lips writhing in a snarl, crowded close to Metcalf, facing the men. Dutch Jake and Sawtooth flanked him.

"You heard the boss speak—why don't you start?" the Pecos Kid hissed.

The disgruntled cowboys melted away like butter in a hot sun. Despite the superiority of numbers they had no stomach to face the trio of finished gunmen. With the backing of these three it was obvious that Metcalf was still master of the situation, at least by leaving the Mexican out of the count.

For all his confidence that he was right Steve felt an unreasonable apprehension as the counting began. He knew he was dealing with crooks, and the future course of his life depended upon the outcome. Vindication meant far more to him than the satisfaction of judgment proven correct. More than all else it meant that the Gibbs outfit could be saved before it was completely ruined by the systematic pilfering of the rustlers. But if it should happen that he was wrong what a fiasco it would be after the talk he had been making to Jennie Gibbs.

The one thing he had most to guard against was a crooked count. He took a position alongside Walker as the herd began to string through. Opposite them Metcalf and Ortega were stationed, also keeping tally. Eutsler was with them, but he was not counting, his purpose being to look the herd over as it passed through for Diamond M stock that might possibly have been overlooked. Walker early proved to be a slow counter, so the cattle had to be trickled through slowly to enable him to keep up. Steve settled down for a long and tiresome day.

All in all he could see little possibility for any mistake in the count. As he glanced at the scowling foreman intent upon his counting, and the debonair Mexican likewise indolently keeping count Steve was suddenly struck with a possible solution of the question that had bothered him so much. What if the two men were both rustlers and were shrewdly trying to shift the blame upon the other's shoulders if the game should be shown up. Ortega's coldness toward Metcalf and his retainers, and his friendliness for Steve might be construed in his favor when the crisis came. Metcalf's hand was not so plain, but the cattle boss might very easily have other cards up his sleeve for he was far from being a dull man, and his influence with Walker was very great.

Above the tumult made by the bawling cattle Steve could hear the hoarse yells of the cowboys as they urged the cattle in between the hills, and on out of the way after they were counted. At each hundred head, Steve cut a small notch in his tally stick and a deeper one for every tenth notch. He counted on and on monotonously. The cattle flowed down the ravine between the hills as ceaselessly as a stream of water. Finally Steve rapidly checked off the number of deep notches in his stick.

The result was dumfounding. More than twenty-five thousand head had passed through and there seemed to be no end of the living stream. It seemed almost incomprehensible. He would have staked his life that there were not more than twenty-one or two thousand at the most. He cut through the cattle to Eutsler's side.

"Jack," he said, "there's something crooked here. Count for me till I ride up to the top of this knoll an' look around. Tally starts with that roan heifer."

Eutsler accepted the stick, and Steve climbed to the pinnacle of the hill as rapidly as possible. From this vantage point he had a commanding view of the plateau. Everything seemed to be in order. The cattle that had been counted out were spreading out in an ever increasing fan, and busy riders on either flank were crowding them on out of the way. In the other direction he could

see the tail end of the herd and the riders who were urging them up. There was not a crooked thing in sight.

With a bitter sinking of the heart Steve returned and relieved Eutsler. Somehow, he knew, they had contrived to trick him.

With the passing through of the last reluctant calf the four men began totalling up their tallies. Steve and Metcalf were through before Walker and Ortega, who had kept track with paper and pencil.

"How's this, Metcalf?" Walker demanded when he at last looked up from his paper. "Your last report showed that there should be twenty-nine thousand head of cattle. There is only twenty-seven thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight. Practically a thousand short. That is too big a loss."

"My count shows twenty-eight thousand and twenty-three," Metcalf said unperturbed.

"Twenty-eight thousand and sixteen," Ortega announced.

"What's your count?" Metcalf asked Steve sneeringly. "Eighteen thousand I reckon."

"Twenty-eight thousand and fifteen," Steve said briefly.

"That's even countin', I claim—only forty-five head difference between the highest and the lowest. Might as well average it at twenty-eight thousand," Eutsler contributed, obviously to create a diversion, for he was essentially a peace-loving man.

"That's all right as far as this count is concerned—but the count lies," Steve said slowly.

Walker and Metcalf laughed loudly, and Eutsler regarded Steve with cold disfavor. The Mexican's gaze dwelt upon Steve with a troubled, speculative look.

"This is a rare joke on you, cowboy—your wild claim that a third of our cattle are missing. I'll enjoy telling Miss Gibbs about this," Walker snickered.

Steve could find no reply.

"What about the missing thousand head?" Ortega interrupted.

"About that missin' thousand—I've an idea I can bring 'em in about to-morrow, or at least locate 'em," Metcalf volunteered.

"I thought you said they had all been gathered!" Walker exclaimed.

"I did—and they have," the foreman replied enigmatically.

The others faced him inquiringly, by their silence demanding an explanation.

"If you'll all stay at camp to-night I'll try to show you tomorrow," Metcalf said, with a significant accent upon the "all."

"Me—I'm through with this outfit right now," Steve said bitterly.

"I thought you would be when I commenced to talk about them missing cattle," Metcalf stated.

Steve spun his horse around, and his hand fell to his gun with deadly purpose.

"What are you drivin' at?" he demanded tensely.

A number of the riders following the cattle had ridden up, and Metcalf backed his horse between Sawtooth and Dutch Jake.

"Jake," he said, "tell these gents what you told me this mornin'."

"All I've got to tell," Dutch Jake said gruffly, "is that while I've been ridin' night herd I suspected several times that there was somebody tamperin' with the herd, but I never could ketch 'em at it. Then I heard how this pardner of Wild Pete's always took his bed to the brush instead of sleepin' at camp with the rest of the outfit. So, when I was supposed to be sleepin', I took a ride down to the big bend where they run their dogies. I reckon there must be a thousand head of the cattle we've gathered in there now—unless they've just been shoved on down river."

"—— your soul, are you insinuatin' that me an' Pete rustled them cattle?" Steve demanded fiercely.

"No. I'm just statin' the evidence," Dutch Jake asserted.

With a mighty effort Steve controlled himself.

"The only thing that prevents me killin' you," he gritted, "is that I want the satisfaction of gittin' the men that's puttin' you up to this."

"Listen, Malty," Jack Eutsler said sternly, "already you've give reasons enough around here to git yourself hanged. First you and your partner drift in here from God knows where an' refuse to give any account of yourself. Then you go an' kill Hogitsi. Then you join up with Wild Pete who's give every honest cattleman plenty of room to suspicion him. Then you start a lot of loose talk to throw suspicion on the Wineglass.

"Now when it's proved that that's all wind, an' this other business crops up you'd better consider yourself lucky that the boys

are willin' to let you leave the country instead of talkin' about what you're goin' to do. This is a long, straight talk an' I wouldn't bother to give it to you if it wasn't that Mrs. Gibbs and Jennie kinda like you. I'm talkin' for your own good, for if I know cowboys the first time after this they git something on you it'll be Katy-bar-the-door for you."

"Much obliged for the kind, fatherly advice, Eutsler," Steve said sarcastically, "but I reckon I'll not take it. Furthermore, I'm goin' to stick right here until I pin this rustlin' right down to where it belongs—an' that's somewhere among the Wineglass."

He swung his horse and rode away, and none offered to commit suicide by trying to stop him; but Ortega rode alongside him cautiously until they were out of earshot.

"This looks like a pretty serious business, my friend," the Mexican remarked. "Now, perhaps, if you would listen to a proposal from me——"

"I've been lookin' for some sort of a proposal from you," Steve cut him off curtly, "but let me tell you right now that you can't use me like you do the rest of the bunch around here. Some of these days I'll git the goods on you, an' when I do you an' me are goin' to shoot it out personal. Understand?"

Ortega shrugged.

"Of course, if that's the way you feel——"

He wheeled his horse and rode toward the cattle.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REP

STEVE was under no illusions as to his present status on the range. True, so far as actual proof was concerned, the frame-up was weak; yet he knew that plenty of men had been hanged in the range country on less evidence. In letting him go unmolested his enemies undoubtedly expected him to take Eutsler's advice and leave the country, and if he should fail he knew what to expect.

"But they don't know their man," Steve said from between clenched teeth. "They got me with my back against the wall, but here I stick till the cows come home. I'll know the truth about this rustlin', or I'll take a bunch of 'em with me over the big hump."

But he could not formulate into words his feelings where Jennie Gibbs was concerned. She had trusted him when he was accused of murder, she had believed in him when he had made his astonishing charges about the rustling, she had shown faith in him when she had rode by his side in the face of possible hostile bullets, but could her confidence endure now that the whole structure of his judgment had collapsed, and he, himself, was placed in exactly the same position in which he had boasted he would place his enemies? By no stretch of the imagination could he hope so.

He pictured vividly the dapper Walker animatedly relating the events of the day to Jennie, and emphasizing the evidence against himself, and the solemn-faced affirmations of Eutsler. And he could make no defense. He well knew that any protestations he might make would be supremely ridiculous until he could back them up with proof, and until that time arrived Walker would have a clear field. He raced his horse furiously toward Wild Pete's camp in an effort to dismiss the subject from his mind.

He rode into camp and shouted for Pete. After a time the Dane inquired from the darkness what was wanted.

"Do you know anything about any Wineglass cattle bein' here in the Bend?" Steve asked.

"Yeh," the Dane chuckled. "They've been dribblin' in for a week, an' I've been lettin' 'em stay."

"Why?"

"So's to make your case stronger when they count up there. The more there is down here the worse the count'll look," Wild Pete explained with a boisterous laugh.

"Well, it'll probably mean you an' me as the guests of honor at a hemp party. The Wineglass has been throwin' 'em in here a-purpose," Steve explained wearily.

"Say that over," the Dane demanded.

Steve briefly explained what had happened, and Wild Pete raged up and down like a cornered grizzly.

"I hope they'll try hangin' us, I only hope they'll try it," the Dane roared as Steve finished.

"We'll find out in the mornin'," Steve said grimly, flinging himself upon his blankets.

Before noon the Wineglass men came, with Metcalf, Ortega, and the Pecos Kid in the lead. Before they were in revolver shooting distance Wild Pete waved his

Winchester in the air, and bellowed at them to stop.

"We want our cattle," Metcalf shouted back.

"That all?"

"No. We want a talk."

"All right, bring it along—two of you, but no more."

All three started, but Ortega sharply ordered the Pecos Kid to stay back. With a snarling protest the Kid dropped behind.

"Which of you's responsible for dumpin' them cattle onto my range?" Wild Pete demanded, as furiously earnest as though he had opposed the entrance of the cattle.

"None of us," Metcalf replied.

"Are you still huggin' the idea to your breast that we run 'em down here?" Steve asked quietly.

Metcalf shifted his gaze about from place to place uneasily.

"There ain't nothin' happened to change our minds," he retorted.

"If you hold that we're rustlers, there's only one honorable course for you to take," Steve challenged.

Metcalf stirred uneasily. With his men so far behind he was in a decidedly unpleasant position.

"Don't go to tryin' to stir us up," he said nervously. "There's enough of us to handle you fellows easy enough, but we don't want to do nothin' drastic until we're dead sure. All we want this time is our cattle, but if we find anything that looks crooked again we'll sure string you up. If you take my advice——"

"We ain't takin' your advice this season," Steve snapped. "Now gather up your cattle an' git to —— out of here."

"An' the nex' time any of your outfit comes into this bend you want to come a-shootin'," Wild Pete added.

The following morning Wild Pete ordered Steve to go across the Blacksnake to rep at a round-up that was then on over there.

"But there's liable to be a lot of action here," Steve demurred. "I ought to be here to help."

"I can take care of all the trouble that outfit can bring me," the Dane crowed confidently.

Except for three Wineglass riders, and the cowboy called Shanks who was reping for the Bucketbail and Diamond M, and a few riders whom he had met while they were reping at the Wineglass round-up, Steve found himself among strangers. But he was quickly made to feel that the usual hospitable welcome of the cow camp was not for him.

He was shut out from all conversations; the boss of the round-up never gave him an order, nor made a request of him, and every place he went he was followed by the cold eye of suspicion. Plainly the Wineglass riders had left nothing unsaid that would injure his reputation. To a fun-loving, companionable fellow like Steve the dose was a bitter one. He wanted to leave, but his boss had ordered him to stay, and stay he would.

As he was left strictly to his own devices, Steve poked about in unfamiliar places by himself, only showing up to look through the rodeo for Wild Pete's stuff. Thus it happened that one day he found himself in a swampy pasture covered with birch and willows. Riding through this he suddenly ran across a sizable bunch of cattle grazing in tulles taller than a man's head. To his surprize the cattle were Wineglass, Bucketbail, and Diamond M stuff, with here and there a dogey belonging to some Mormon of Clearfield.

He was positive that they had not been at the round-up across the river. Quite without intending to, he began to whistle—the first time in many weeks. At last he felt that he might be approaching something tangible. He gathered up the cattle and began shoving them toward the gate. Obviously his first duty was to deliver them at the rodeo. Close to the gate an iron-whiskered old rancher came tearing up on a horse.

"What you doin' with them cattle?" he demanded bellicosely.

"Drivin' 'em along ahead of me," Steve returned impudently.

The rancher flourished a shotgun. "You leave them cattle strictly alone, young feller," he thundered.

"I reckon not, pardner—I happen to know who this stuff belongs to," Steve replied easily.

"So do I, an' they stay right in my field. I've been holdin' 'em fer a month to pay a pasture bill them outfits owes me from las' Fall. They got away once without payin', but they don't do it again, *sabe?*"

"Clever scheme for sellin' your pasture," Steve remarked blandly.

"None of your insults now. I'll just give

you five minutes to git through that gate an' off my land."

Steve rode around to the wire gate as though to comply, reached over and flipped the wire fastener from the gate post, threw the gate on the ground, and without stopping rode back behind the cattle.

"I thought you was goin' to leave," the rancher ejaculated.

"I am—right behind these cattle," Steve grinned.

"I've warned ye," the rancher howled, starting to throw the shotgun to his shoulder. A moment later the weapon was lying on the ground, and he was regarding the cowboy with frightened eyes, while he ruefully rubbed a numb arm.

Steve carelessly replaced his six-shooter with which he had shot the gun from the man's hands. Then he calmly gathered up the cattle, drove them through the gate, and in due time turned them over to Shanks and the Wineglass riders.

This was the only thing of interest he had to report to Wild Pete when he returned, and the zest of this little adventure was lost because he had believed for a time that he was on the trail of the rustlers, and it had turned out to be nothing but the petty scheme of a despicable, grafting rancher.

Wild Pete, however, listened to the story thoughtfully.

"I know the old devil," he said. "It's old Griffo. I think I'll leave you to hold down the camp, while I poke over an' see him. Mebbe he's holdin' some of our cattle for pasture."

Steve sensed that the giant Dane had some other reason, but Wild Pete evaded his question by stating casually:

"They've got a new foreman of the Diamond M. It's Bob Logan, that former pardner of yours."

CHAPTER XIX

WILD PETE'S LAST RIDE

WILD Pete departed the next morning, leaving Steve no more definite information than that he was going to see old Griffo. In the meantime there was little for Steve to do, but after cleaning up the camp, wrangling the cavy, and roping a fresh horse, he started to ride across the neck of land that separated the bend of the river from the rest of the range. By riding this line every day they were able to practically keep their cattle isolated.

Steve had scarcely reached the line when he met Bob Logan, and Brig Cross. Steve felt a thrill of joy at seeing his old pardner, and then something that was very near a pang of resentment that Bob had landed the job that he felt he was by every right entitled to. He throttled this feeling instantly, aghast that he had been guilty of even a moment's disloyalty to his old friend.

"Well, how's the new foreman," he sang out.

"Still got all the buttons on my vest," Bob grinned.

"Good. Say, old horse, I'm sure tickled to death over you gittin' that job," Steve said sincerely.

"It didn't belong to me by rights, but Eutsler had to stay on the ranch, an' you never showed up to claim your property, so they had to use me for a stop-gap," Bob explained.

"Go on. You're just the boy for the place," Steve declared.

There were many things each wanted to say to the other, but their changed relationship, and the presence of Brig Cross made it difficult to talk. Somehow, there seemed to be an invisible barrier between them though each loved the other like a brother.

"Let's ride across this neck here, an' then go to camp an' git some dinner," Steve suggested. "I ain't really had a look at these dogeys for days an' days."

"All right," Bob agreed promptly.

As they rode along together, occasionally giving a bunch of cattle a start, they talked of trivial subjects, each waiting for the other to mention something important. With the unconscious skill of the trained cowman they observed brands and ear-marks as they passed. Bob abruptly reined up his horse.

"Thought this stuff was all branded before it was brought up here?" he said.

"It was, I reckon. Why?"

"There's a critter with a fresh brand, or I'm a liar. What do you call that iron?"

"It's one of the irons Pete handles. He calls it the Five Diamonds. You see it's a big diamond and is divided into four little ones inside," Steve explained as he carefully scrutinized the calf.

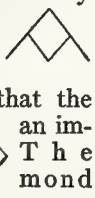
Unquestionably the brand was still raw. It did not look over a day old. Suddenly

he looked at Bob, and found his old friend regarding him quizzically.

"There's no doubt about it," Steve said. "That five diamond has been run on top of the Diamond M."

"It sure has," Bob agreed.

The revamped branding had been crudely done. The Diamond M brand had been simply worked over by an inverted brand of the same kind beneath it in such a way that the ends of the M met, forming an imperfect Five Diamond. The old scar of the original Diamond M, however, was still visible.



"Well," Steve said, and there was just a touch of asperity in his voice, "you're lookin' after the Diamond M stuff now—what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I'm goin' to find out who done it, an' see that they hang for it," Bob said quietly.

"Even if it turns out to be me?" Steve enquired.

"Even if it turns out to be you—but that'll never happen," Bob said earnestly.

"Then who do you think it will be?"

"I've told you all along that I never liked Wild Pete," Bob said, speaking slowly.

Steve's intense loyalty to his friends flamed up.

"Don't make that insinuation again, Bob, unless you want to have trouble with me. Wild Pete may be crazy, but he's straight."

"I won't quarrel with you about it, Steve; but if the trail leads to him I'll follow it."

"I'm sorry we can't agree," Steve said stiffly. "As foreman of the Diamond M it's up to you to stop the rustlin', but if you come after Pete you've got to come after me. So-long."

He wheeled his horse and rode away.

Bob Logan gazed after his pardner regretfully. Then he, too, turned and rode slowly toward his own camp, cursing the day when he had been persuaded to become foreman of the Diamond M outfit.

The true cattleman's sense of honor was his, and he knew that he would have to try to get the cattle back, and fasten the crime on the guilty parties. The trail, as he saw it, pointed straight to Wild Pete. Steve had been misguided in trying to lay it to the Wineglass outfit, but knowing his pardner as he did, Bob knew that Steve would stick with the Dane to the last gasp.

Bob knew that the excitement over the unexpected result of the count of Wineglass cattle was intense. All the little ranchers who had been steadily losing their cattle were now convinced that Wild Pete was getting away with them, and that his Summer herd was simply a blind to cover his operations. Bob, himself, had heard Bishop Compton loudly assert that Steve and the Dane should have been hanged, and that he would lead his people against them the next time there was the slightest provocation. That time had arrived.

Suddenly Bob missed Brig Cross. In his agitation over finding the calf with the doctored brand he had completely forgotten the Mormon boy. He had a vague remembrance of Brig leaving him right after the departure of Steve. Undoubtedly Brig had gone to report to his bishop.

Bob never thought harder nor quicker in his life. His calm nature and unexcitable temperament stood him well in hand at this time. He checked his first impulse to go and warn Steve. Any warning to that headstrong cowpuncher would only send him raging out to meet his enemies. Likewise he vetoed the next idea that occurred to him; which was to argue the case with Bishop Compton. There was too much ingrained religious zeal in the man for him to listen reasonably to a mere cowpuncher. But there was one person to whom either of the firebrands might listen, and that was Jennie Gibbs.

It seemed to Bob that his best chance to help his pardner was to enlist her aid. After that he could come back, and if they came after Steve he could— What could he do? Go with them or fight them? Down in his heart he knew which it would be when the crisis came, but reason, and the traditions of his calling forbade him admitting it.

As for Steve, that cowboy was more shaken by his breach with Bob than he had ever been in his life. At last he saw clearly that the Wineglass outfit had tricked and outwitted him at every turn. He had imagined that the very magnitude of their stealing would make it comparatively easy to trap them, and he had conceitedly gone after them alone; but they had defeated him. Not only had they come through with a clean bill of health, but they had neatly turned suspicion against him, and

the only other man they had occasion to fear.

As he reviewed the case, Ortega, the master mind and the cold-blooded killer had at first tried to kill him, and had then tried to make some sort of crooked proposition to him. Having failed in this the doctored calf had been the next step. The Wineglass would not even have the trouble of a lynching. The honest cattlemen, perhaps led by Bob Logan, would take the next, and final action.

"And still, I don't think they're goin' to slide out of it quite so easy as they figure," Steve ruminated.

His mind was made up. He had to run—not away from trouble, but to meet it head-on. He would have started for the Wineglass camp, alone, but he felt that he must tell Wild Pete who had murdered his Indian boy. He knew that the Dane would go berserk, but so much the better—there would be a pair of them. And if they got their hands on a rustler that man would speak the truth.

He kept his horse saddled, and ready to ride, while he cooked his dinner and waited for the turn of events. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with an exclamation. A figure had emerged from a coulée, and was coming toward him slowly; but it weaved and wabbled about on its feet like a man in the last stages of drunkenness. Its progress was snail slow, but the camp obviously was its destination. Steve ran to meet the man.

"Good God, Pete! What's happened?" he cried.

He saw that the front of the Dane's shirt was soggy with blood.

He helped the man into camp, and brought water while Wild Pete fought for breath. Steve swiftly cut off the shirt, and bared a fearful looking, jagged hole in the giant's breast. He washed it out, and bandaged it as best he could, but even he, inexperienced as he was, knew the Dane was dying.

"I'm —— fool—killed my horse—when I needed one. Five miles back," Wild Pete enunciated between gasps.

"Five miles! You walked five miles in that condition? My ——!" Steve exclaimed in awe. "What happened?"

It was minutes before the giant could reply. It seemed that even his tremendous vitality had been used up by the terrific strain of walking five miles with a hole in his lung. When he did speak his voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

"Had to tell you. Las' night found—Wineglass trail—Griffo—Tincup—Star Valley."

"You mean you found the way the Wineglass have been trailin' the rustled cattle out of the country?" Steve asked breathlessly.

Wild Pete nodded.

Quick comprehension dawned upon Steve. He had always considered it impossible for the rustlers to get away with the cattle to the eastward, but this obviously was what they had been doing. Star Valley was in Wyoming, in the heart of the outlaw country, and on the other side of a rugged range of mountains, but there was a route across—the Tincup trail.

Steve now saw that the cattle he had taken from Griffo was a bunch the rustlers had started over the trail. Griffo's ranch was a station, and no doubt there were other crooked ranchers along the way whose real business was to drive the stolen cattle from one ranch to another along the Tincup trail. That explained how the cattle could be driven a long distance without any of the original thieves being long missing from the range. The organization which Steve had suspected of having an existence was even more complex and far-reaching than he had imagined.

"Who shot you?" Steve asked the dying man.

"Bunch rustlers. Had—fight. Daylight."

"I see," Steve said gently, holding a dipper of water to the dying man's lips.

"Caught Sawtooth," the Dane mumbled presently. "Choke—choke—" His huge hands opened and closed suggestively. "Made him tell who—who—killed Charley. Like to choke him, too."

Under the stress of emotion his voice became for the moment stronger, but Steve knew that when the reaction came the big man would probably never speak again.

"I know—it was that —— Mexican. I'll kill him for you if it's the last thing I ever do," Steve promised.

"Yes—he's Mexican," Wild Pete nodded his comprehension as his voice again failed him.

For an hour Steve watched the dying man, doing what he could for him. Once

the big cowboy roused himself and spoke—

"Made Sawtooth tell how they fooled you, Steve, 'fore I killed him. Hole-in-the-rock."

The effort was his last. Shortly after he lapsed into a state of coma and as darkness settled down over the gray hills, he died.

Steve knew that he had no time to waste. Some of the Wineglass men who had fought Wild Pete would surely carry the news that he had escaped with their plans, and wolves that they were, he knew that the night would bring them down on the camp. He tenderly wrapped a blanket around the body of the big viking whose restless, reckless career was at last closed.

"If they don't git me, old pardner, I'll come back an' bury you decent," he promised soberly.

CHAPTER XX

A NIGHT OF DISCOVERIES

STEVE stepped outside the tent to see if his horse was all right, and instinctively stopped to listen. At first he thought he heard nothing but the vague night noises, and then he recognized that the had been intent upon hearing horses gallop. Attuning his ear to a different sound he presently caught faintly, but unmistakably, the champ—champ—champing of horses restlessly fighting their bridle bits. He listened for a moment more with his ear pressed to the ground.

"Comin' after me with their horses' feet muffled," he commented to himself.

They were not a half mile away, spread out in a half circle in a way that left Steve no way out of the Bend except across the river. They would gradually close into a circle around the camp.

"I've a notion to have it out with 'em right here," Steve murmured, "but I'd rather have daylight so's I can pick my men."

He stepped back into the tent and picked up Wild Pete's Winchester. Before leaving the tent another thought struck him. By the light of a lantern which he carefully hooded he tore a sheet from a time book and wrote on it a brief outline of how the rustlers got the cattle out of the country, and also how Wild Pete met his death. He folded it and placed it in the top of his war-bag.

For years he and Bob had had a custom of leaving notes for each other in their war-bags. If anything happened to him he knew that Bob would look through his war-bag and find the note. The Wineglass plans would be exposed.

With the rifle in his hand he mounted his horse, and urged the animal into the river. The current was swift, but the river was not extremely wide so the horse made the swim without any great difficulty. Steve was confident that the noise of the water had drowned the noise of his crossing, but he waited in the shelter of the brush for developments. It seemed a long, long time before anything happened. Then a quarter moon came up, throwing a dim haze of light through the thin white clouds which floated lazily above the horizon. There was just light enough to create optical illusions. The bushes, swaying lightly before the wind, all seemed to be furtive moving figures of men.

As usual the reality dispelled the illusion. Steve finally caught an occasional glimpse of men moving toward the camp. Then he realized that they must have tied their horses some distance away, and were creeping in on foot to take the camp by surprize. A moment later there came a concerted yell, and the tent was rushed by a score of men.

Steve waited.

Soon he saw matches being struck inside the tent. Suddenly they disappeared as though snuffed out simultaneously by a gust of wind. A startled yell smote the darkness, and the tent quivered and reeled as a dozen men tried to get through the door at once. They had stumbled over the body of Wild Pete. Grim jest that it was, Steve could not help chuckling.

He could just hear the hum of excited voices above the tumult of the river, but he could not make out what they were saying. Then some voice was raised in a shout which carried to him.

"Come in fellers, Wild Pete is dead, but the other feller's got away. We got to git him —— quick."

The voice was that of Dutch Jake.

"Ortega an' Metcalf ain't there. —— their smooth souls they're stayin' out of danger—but danger's comin' to 'em all the same," Steve whispered.

Just then one of his sudden impulses seized him, and he raised Wild Pete's

Winchester to his shoulder and fired at one of the moving objects across the river.

He was rewarded by hearing several yells, but none of them were of pain. Cursing himself for his foolishness he got on his horse and galloped up the river. The only thing he had accomplished by his foolhardy shot was to disclose his own whereabouts. Fortunately the men had to run back a short distance to get their horses which gave him a lead. He knew, however, that they would soon be on his own side of the river in full pursuit—a fact which decided him to get back on theirs as soon as possible.

He crossed over at the first ford, and wondered what to do next. To ride straight to the Diamond M camp, see Bob, and tell him how matters stood would have been the sensible thing to do. Bob could then stop the Mormons from doing any harm for a while.

Steve wondered if the story of the doctored calf had yet reached the Gibbs ranch. He felt sure that it had, for nothing travels so fast as evil news. "What matter," he reflected, "they're plumb poisoned agin me before this anyway."

The thought of Jennie turned him from the Diamond M camp. He had set out originally to prove that there was wholesale rustling on the range, and he would do it or die in the attempt. There popped into his mind Wild Pete's last words about choking the truth out of Sawtooth. What a titanic encounter that must have been between the two giants! The words: 'hole-in-the-rock'—what could they mean?

"There's a hole somewhere in the rock of their plans, an' I've got to find it," Steve muttered. Suddenly he slapped the leg of his leather chaps a resounding blow. "It's the count—it must be the count!"

He stopped his horse and listened. All was silent behind him but he knew that the rustlers were on his trail as relentlessly as wolves. Then, far out in front of him he heard the clickety-click, clopety-clop of a galloping horse. It was going north, so it could not belong to any of the men with Dutch Jake. Steve spurred rapidly forward hoping to get a glimpse of the rider, but his horse was winded before he reached the place where he had hoped to intercept the man, and the stranger had passed.

"Well, let him go," Steve told his puffing horse, turning it to the southward, "we've got other things to do."

The detour he made trying to catch this rider had taken him so far to the west that he perceived that the nearest trail to where he wanted to go lay past the Bucketbail camp.

He had nothing but contempt for Fink and his gang, and he was not at all certain that they were not in with the rustlers. So he was passing by without notifying any one of his presence, when his horse jumped violently sideways, and tore back up the trail in frenzied terror. Steve finally stopped the frightened animal, but he could not urge it back up the trail.

At last he dismounted and tied the horse to a tree while he went on afoot to see what had scared it. Suddenly, under a lone pine tree, he saw what it was, and the sight sent the cold chills creeping up his spine. Swaying gently back and forth in the breeze under a limb of the tree was the body of a man with the head lolling suggestively. It's identity gave Steve another shock. It was Bill Cummins, the stupid cat's-paw of Fink.

Why Cummins should have been hanged was a mystery to Steve. There was nothing he could do about it so he returned to his horse and making a wide detour rode on, racking his brain for a possible reason. Of one thing he was certain; there was no more pretense nor dissembling on the range. Things were moving in deadly earnest. The cowboy's jaw set grimly as he determined to be in on some of the action that was plainly forthcoming.

He passed around the Wineglass camp and climbed the plateau where the Wineglass cattle had been counted. He struck the trail where the cattle had passed after being counted and followed it. The dust they had made was still ankle deep and easy to follow. Suddenly there was a sharp jump-off of a hundred feet—not so steep, however, that cattle could not descend.

Half-way down this was a shelf of rock twenty feet wide. A pair of gigantic lava boulders stood off to the right, their heads leaning together like the arch of a mammoth gate. Steve rode between them and was amazed to see the mouth of a natural cave opening in the face of solid rock.

He returned to the shelf and studied the tracks. The stream of them diverged, part passed between the lava sentinels,

while the rest passed on down the slope and away across the flat. He saw that three or four riders could work on this shelf, keeping a steady stream of cattle going into the hole in the rock all day with no danger of detection from behind. Any one looking across the country from the top of the highest hill, where Steve in fact had looked, would see only the rest of the cattle spreading out over the flat, nor miss those which were side-tracked.

Satisfied, he spurred his horse into the cave and found it to be a long, almost straight corridor. It was now dawn and occasional shafts of light filtered down through the crevices in the volcanic formation above. Finally he saw a larger chunk of daylight on a level ahead of him, and riding toward it emerged in a patch of scrub cedar on the side of a hill.

The cattle tracks were still plainly visible. Looking around he saw that he was on the opposite side of one of the knolls between which the cattle had been counted. One wing of the herd had been held there all day, and it was strikingly evident that the cattle coming out of the scrub cedar would not be noticed in the great heaving moving mass of cattle waiting to be counted.

"It's simple—almost too simple," Steve observed. "Counted the same cattle on us over and over again."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SIEGE

WITH this final evidence in his possession Steve was ready to go back and face the Mormons. What had seemed a hopeless cause twelve hours before now seemed ready to be crowned with victory. He smiled a little at this change of attitude overnight. The evening before he had wanted nothing so much as to come face to face with certain of the Wineglass outfit—now he wanted nothing so much as to avoid them for a time.

He was riding along, lost in thought, never dreaming of danger when there came the report of a rifle, and he felt his horse totter. A moment later it pitched heavily to the ground. Steve landed on his feet, but instantly dropped to the ground beside the dead animal. He could not see his opponents, but a rain of bullets, some of which thudded into the body of the horse, revealed that there was more than one invisible enemy concealed among the rocks and brush.

The Winchester was on the under side of the dead horse, tied fast to the saddle so he could not get it. It was obvious that his present position was untenable. There was a ragged rock-covered knoll a short distance away, where he felt he could hold off his enemies if he could get there. It was too far away to make a run for, so he rolled over and over like a barrel until he reached the shelter of a boulder.

There he stopped to get a line on things. His first thought was to wonder why his enemies happened to be there at that hour, but he had little time for speculations. A bullet spat angrily against the boulder. To get to the next shelter toward the top of the hill required a run of a hundred yards. He ducked his head and ran for it.

Promptly there came another rain of bullets, and twenty feet from the boulder Steve went down with a bullet through the flesh on the back of his left leg. He rolled back to the shelter of the boulder and waited grimly for developments.

Presently he discerned a movement among the bushes out on the flat. He raised his gun to fire, but before he could press the trigger there came the roar of a Winchester, and the object he had seen leaped high in the air, and came down in a huddle. The man was a Wineglass rider.

Steve's mind was working like lightning. At once he perceived the meaning of the men's presence. The man with the Winchester who had shot the cowboy was some one the Wineglass had cornered on the top of the hill. Probably a sheepherder, he thought. Perhaps Al Young, for Steve knew that Al still lingered in the vicinity. Whoever he was, he was a brother in adversity. How untenable his own position was, was revealed when another bullet slapped wrathfully against the boulder a scant three inches above his head.

A short distance to his left Steve saw a small grove of quaking aspens growing on the side of the hill. The trees would not stop bullets, perhaps, but they afforded a much better cover than the boulder. He decided to try to reach them. Dragging his wounded leg he crawled on hands and knees toward the place. A six-shooter spat, but the

man who had fired it yelped with pain as the man on the hill-top was again heard from.

Other bullets rattled around, but none of them close. Steve knew that his unknown friend was on guard and covering his retreat so thoroughly that his enemies dared not show themselves to take aim. A moment later he thankfully reached the trees.

They afforded a much better cover than Steve had anticipated. There were more of them than he had thought, and the ones farther back were growing in a niche in the hillside, offering perfect protection from both sides. He crawled back there rapidly, but stopped with his hand on his gun as he came upon a saddled horse.

It was Ortega's famous Freckles. A careful look around convinced him that the horse's owner was not there.

"Some luck after all," Steve thought. "Mr. Mexican has left his horse here while he tries to bushwhack the guy on top afoot. When he comes back me an' him will have our long-delayed settlement."

The place proved to be nothing but a pocket in the hillside. In front the hill dropped away over a shelf five or six feet high. Steve decided that he could defend himself from any attack from that quarter, or by the way he had come in without exposing himself. From above he would have to depend upon the unknown at the top of the knoll. All in all he was satisfied he had hit it pretty lucky.

He could hear some one shouting out on the flat:

"Go up there an' eat 'em up. Where in ——'s the Pecos Kid? If him or Dutch Jake, or Sawtooth was here they'd have had both of them fellers before this."

"Metcalf, that lets you out," Steve murmured. "Up till now I thought there might be a chance you were innocent."

"Why don't you git 'em yourself," a jeering voice taunted.

"I will. Watch my smoke," Metcalf responded in a way that showed clearly it was not the first time he had been goaded.

"Yes you will—like ——," Steve said to himself. "Ain't none of 'em got the guts to tackle us. There's a big chance to git away yet."

Had it not been for deserting his unknown friend he would have tried to make a getaway on the Mexican's horse, but he was determined to see the man through.

He heard a noise just below him and fired twice rapidly toward where it sounded. a moment later a hat appeared over the embankment below him. He fired at it, and it dropped. His smile of satisfaction was cut short when three other hats appeared simultaneously. With swift, deadly precision he sent a bullet into each from left to right.

"Now git him, his gun's empty," Metcalf yelled.

Too late Steve realized that he had been fooled by the time worn trick of sticking up an empty hat on a stick. Three men sprang over the embankment and rushed for him. Steve reached frantically for a cartridge from his belt. Two of the three men were Metcalf and Fink, the other was Shanks, one of Fink's cowboys.

"Don't shoot him—hang him," Fink ejaculated brutally.

Steve heard rocks rolling above as they gave way under a leaping man's feet, and an instant later a figure dropped from overhead squarely between Steve and his assailants. Steve was too astonished for a moment to finish putting the cartridge in his gun; but his surprize was not comparable to the look of sickly fear that crossed the faces of the two cattle bosses.

Shanks alone did not lose his self-possession. With an oath he raised his gun.

"You —— greaser, I'll ——"

He did not finish. With the lightning flip of the wrist that Steve had seen Ortega display before, the Mexican shot the cowboy before his gun was more than half drawn.

"Drop your guns," Ortega hissed at the two cattle bosses.

The guns clattered to the ground.

"I should have killed you long ago, Metcalf, but I was not sure until yesterday that you were as despicable as you are. I never knew even half of the truth until I forced it out of Cummins. He read your death warrant."

Ortega turned to Steve.

"Is your gun loaded?" he asked.

Steve had just finished the operation.

"It is," he said grimly.

"Watch Mr. Fink," Ortega requested. "Now Metcalf," he said, "I'm giving you an even break. Pick up your gun. When your hand reaches the level of your waist, the same as mine, I shall shoot."

Metcalf's face was ashen, but the terrible determination of fear shone in his eyes. He reminded Steve of the slow, deliberate movements of a cat just before it springs upon its victim. The cowboy realized that these two men whom he had imagined to be brothers in iniquity were at last giving vent to a long suppressed, consuming hatred, more implacable even than his own hatred of Ortega.

Metcalf stepped forward a step, and without taking his eyes from the Mexican's face, reached down and backward until his groping fingers closed over the barrel of his gun. Then he moved with uncanny speed. He did not bring the gun to the level of his waist, but threw it viciously, butt first, from the ground. It hit the surprized Mexican on the right hand, and the same instant Metcalf and Fink leaped backward disappearing below the shelf.

For once Ortega lost all his suavity, and swore loudly and fluently.

"They've got us," he told Steve. "Our only chance is to try to get away on my horse."

"See here, there's a lot of things I don't savvy at all," Steve said, "but I ain't got no more use for you than I have the rest of that bunch. There's a lot of things you've got to answer to me for, an' you might as well know it."

"What, for instance?" Ortega asked.

"First, for draggin' Wild Pete's boy to death. Then for tryin' to bushwhack me one night. An' last, I'm practically sure you're the guy that's been workin' over brands an' layin' it on me an' Wild Pete, an' I'm dead certain that you're the feller that murdered two other Indians, an' two sheepherders."

"Why do you think I did that?" Ortega asked.

"Because Pete's boy was dragged to death with a horsehair rope, an' you own the only one I've seen on this range, an' when you tried to kill me that night you cussed your horse in Spanish, an' you're the only man on the range that's Mexican. Furthermore, Sawtooth confessed to Wild Pete, and told him the man that murdered his boy was a Mexican. That's positive proof."

"I'll not try to get away from you," Ortega said. "We can both ride my horse and if we get away, which is not at all likely, you can shoot me any time you wish. I shall not resist."

"I'll give you as good a chance as you offered Metcalf," Steve retorted. "As for gittin' away; there's another fellow up on the top of this hill that I'm goin' to stick with."

"I'm that other fellow," Ortega said simply. "They chased me here last night. I hid my horse and held them off from the top. It was me that covered you when you crawled in here."

"You told Metcalf you had forced the truth out of Cummins; what did you mean, an' why did you hang him?" Steve asked sharply.

"I did not hang Cummins. If he was hanged, Fink did it. As for the rest you wouldn't understand. I suppose there is no use for me to deny killing those people, or being a cattle rustler, for you would not believe me," Ortega said wearily.

The doubt which Steve always felt when in the presence of Ortega reasserted itself.

"I might," he said, "if you would tell who did do those killings—or do you know?"

"I know, but I'll never tell," the Mexican stated firmly.

"Then I'll hold you to it for the murder of Wild Pete's boy," Steve announced grimly. "Get your gun, an' git ready to fight."

Ortega turned his back and walked over to his horse which he untied.

"Go ahead and shoot," he remarked nonchalantly.

Steve sat down in the dirt.

"Oh, ——," he remarked disgustedly.

Suddenly there was a chorus of wild yells from the other side of the hill, followed by a fusillade of rifle shots. A minute later the Wineglass men down on the flat were running frantically for their horses while bullets kicked up the dust around their feet.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FINAL ROUND-UP

STEVE hobbled to the edge of the trees, and saw a number of gaunt, bearded men pouring lead into the retreating cowboys with deadly precision. He yelled at them, and they soon came up to where he was. Among them was Al Young, grinning amiably.

"What you doin' here?" he demanded.

"We ain't on no bloomin' picnic," Steve responded.

Young saw the dead cowboy and noted Steve's wounded leg. He became at once serious.

"What's wrong, Steve?" he asked.

In terse words Steve recounted the things that had brought him there.

"Rustlers, eh? I heard shootin' and reckoned they had a sheepherder treed up here, so I aroused all these sheps. Looks lucky for you two I did."

"Very lucky," Ortega agreed.

"How'd you come to be here?" Young asked curiously.

"I was on the trail of the rustlers, the same as Steve," Ortega replied promptly.

"Cattle rustlin' of course is none of our business," Young said, "but you two have been danged white with us one time and another, so if you've got any plan to nab 'em we'll help all we can."

"Now that they have failed to capture us there is nothing for them to do but run for it. I've stopped two of them, but there is at least thirty of them, not counting the Bucketbail men. They will be hard to stop," Ortega said.

"There's fifteen of us," Al Young said hopefully.

"Listen," Steve said with iron determination. "They know the game is up as far as doin' any more rustlin' is concerned, but they ain't goin' to pull out of here in their shirt-tails. They'll wait for Dutch Jake an' his bunch to show up, an' it'll take 'em an hour or so to gather up their junk. Then they'll naturally light out through the Squaw creek pass; but you sheps' will have time to ambush 'em in the pass an' turn 'em back. Their next best bet will be to ride around the north end of Devil Creek Mountain, an' I'll try to meet 'em there with Kebro's Injuns. We'll make it mighty interestin' for them rustlers yet."

"We gotcha," Al Young whooped enthusiastically. "But how are you goin' to git them Injuns to join in?"

"They're camped down on the Blacksnake below Wild Pete's camp, an' I'm goin' after 'em. You keep Ortega with you."

"You'll need a good horse for a ride like that," Ortega said imperturbably. "Better take Freckles—there's none better."

"I intended to," Steve said promptly.

He shook hands soberly with Al Young, refusing to let him waste time attending to the wounded leg. He managed to scramble onto Freckles unaided, and let the horse into a long, steady lope which ate up the miles. He was devoutly thankful that the Mexican had such good taste in horses.

His nearest route led him unpleasantly close to the Wineglass camp, but he determined to rely on the speed of the horse if any one sighted him, rather than lose precious minutes around.

Twice he was in sight of the Wineglass camp for a brief instant, but there was evidently too much excitement around the camp for any one to notice him. Three men were hazing in the cavy, and it was evident that they were all busy gathering up their belongings, and preparing to catch fresh horses before leaving. When finally clear of them Steve gave the powerful gray his head and raced for the camp of Kebro's Indians.

His trail lay within a quarter of a mile of Wild Pete's camp. It seemed a brutal thing for him to do, to ride on without taking even a look at his dead friend, but he dared not risk a moment. The one big, the all-important thing, was to capture the rustlers. He knew that would have been the thought uppermost in the mind of the big Dane if he were living, so he rode on.

He was not sure just where the Indians were camped, but the fishing was good and they were not moving about much. When he again struck the river after crossing the bend he struck into a cattle trail that ran down a coulée. When this broke off sharply toward the river he climbed to the top of it, and the first thing that met his eyes was three Indian girls playing on the top of the bluffs above the river a quarter of a mile ahead.

"I'm sure in luck—they've moved up the river instead of down," he told himself jubilantly.

Then he saw a man scrambling up the side of the bluff below the girls. Steve could see the fellow's horse tied at the bottom of the bluff.

He was too far away to recognize the fellow, but his movements and his clothing indicated plainly that he was a white man. Steve had a peculiar feeling that something was wrong, perhaps induced by the method of the fellow's approach, which seemed altogether too stealthy. The girls betrayed by the freedom of their play that they were unaware of the trespasser.

Steve could no longer restrain the foreboding of evil which he felt so strongly. He fired his revolver twice into the air, and loosed a yell at the full capacity of his lungs.

It had the effect of galvanizing the man into redoubled energy, while the girls seemed stupefied with alarm. With a final frantic effort the climbing man gained the top of the bluff and rushed at the girls. Steve heard them scream as they started to run, but the man was after them with the speed of a panther. He caught one of the girls in his arms, and though she fought fiercely she was dragged relentlessly toward the sharp break-off of the bluff.

Steve's interference had evidently defeated the man's original purpose and he dragged the girl toward the cliff, showing his insane intention to get a sinister revenge for being thwarted.

Spurring and yelling Steve turned sick with horror as he realized that he was too far away to do any good. Suddenly the man turned the girl loose, and as she turned to run he seized her by each slim ankle. With a supreme effort he swung her around twice in a circle then released her and she shot out over the top of the bluff and disappeared. Steve knew that the river bank, twenty feet below, was lined with sharp, jagged rocks.

Without even looking to see where the girl had landed the murderer clambered swiftly down to his horse. Steve, who a moment before had been thoroughly excited, became on the instant cold and calm with the deadly rage of the killer. He right-angled from the trail he was on into a coulée that ran down to the river and rode Freckles as he had not been ridden that day.

He met the man face to face at the mouth of the coulée on the smooth, sandy bank of the river.

A camera could not have taken the picture any quicker than every factor of the situation was imprinted upon Steve's brain. From the time he saw the scowling malignant features of the Pecos Kid, brought Freckles to a standstill with a jaw-breaking pull, and felt the recoil of his own six-shooter seemed but the merest fraction of a second; but it was long enough for him to remember a threat once made by the Pecos Kid—"next time I'll be watchin' for that squirm of yours." Because of it he did not squirm sidewise and down as was his habit, but sat firmly erect. Even then he felt a hot sting along the side of his neck.

His adversary had anticipated the squirm, and had Steve made it he would have been drilled squarely between the eyes. The dark face of the Pecos Kid hovered for a moment above the saddle horn, while a look of incredible baffled rage overspread his evil features. Then his body slumped and rolled to the ground.

Steve gazed at the figure in the sand with unspeakable loathing, reined his horse gingerly around it and rode on toward the Indian camp. The Pecos Kid deserved no better treatment.

A few minutes later Steve was engulfed by a mob of excited Indians with Chief Kebro at their head. The chief's face was stern and forbidding.

"My girl—" he said. "Over the bluff—somebody throw-um. You see-um?" he asked sternly.

"You'll find him dead a ways up the river," Steve said laconically.

The Indians looked their astonishment.

"Pecos Kid—mebbe so?" Kebro asked.

"Yes."

They crowded around obviously waiting for details. In as few words as possible Steve described his meeting with the Pecos Kid. He was beginning to feel terribly weak and sick from his long neglected wounded leg. He hastened to change the subject from the Pecos Kid to the rustlers. For once he felt compelled through sheer weakness to talk to the Indians as other men did, because it required fewer words.

"Rustlers—over yonder—big fight way up Squaw pass—sheepherders mebbe so turn-um back Devil Mountain—this end. You ketch-um?"

"Mebbe so—Wineglass—heap big rustlers?" Kebro queried.

"Yeah, you ketch-um," Steve reiterated anxiously.

Kebro bowed gravely.

"You all the time Injun friend. Any time you want—" he made an all-embracing gesture—"Injun git."

The chief spoke a few words rapidly to his followers in the native tongue. Before he had finished War-Jack, whom Steve had missed, rode up visibly excited. He fidgeted as much as an Indian ever dares while he waited for an invitation to speak. When Kebro had finished he glanced at

War-Jack with a brief nod of permission. The young Indian ejaculated a few words explosively, and the somber-faced Indians suddenly doubled up in their saddles with mirth.

"What's he say?" Steve in perplexity demanded of Schoolboy.

He was treated to an insight into Indian sense of humor.

"He say," Schoolboy explained with a wide grin, "Pecos Kid too strong. Him chuck Nannabi too far out. Splash! Git feathers heap wet. No hurt-um too much."

Suddenly Kebro made a signal, the Indians with a war whoop dashed away at top speed.

Steve attempted to follow, but quickly realized that he had ridden too for with his wounded leg. Yet he could not force himself to wait in idleness while the rustlers were being rounded up. Off to his right was a hill known as Injun Knob which he knew was high enough to enable him to have a comprehensive view of the long, narrow flat between Devil Creek, and Devil Creek Mountain where he was sure the final action would be if the sheepherders succeeded in turning the rustlers back at Squaw Pass.

Clinching his teeth to stifle the agony and exercising every atom of his will-power, he rode Freckles to the top of the Knob. Once there he rolled helplessly from the horse and for a while everything was black.

At last he sat up and looked around. He had no idea how much time had passed while he was unconscious, but suddenly his wandering gaze focused upon a moving cloud of dust on the other side of Devil Creek, and he was instantly galvanized into keen interest. That cloud of dust meant, he surmised, that the sheepherders had turned the rustlers back at Squaw Pass, and they were now trying to round the point where the hog-back of the mountain came close down to the Blacksnake.

Steve whooped exultantly, the pain in his leg for the time forgotten, as he saw another cloud of dust sweeping toward the end of the hog-back from his own direction. It was Kebro and his braves and it was a neck and neck race between them and the outlaws. Suddenly Steve jumped upon his one good leg, threw his hat into the air and yelled again. The rustlers had stopped and were changing their course as the Indians shot in ahead of them. And now Steve saw another cloud of dust behind them which he was sure was the sheepherders following up unmindful of the odds against them should the rustlers turn on them again.

But the rustlers were not anxious to risk the delay of a battle. Instead they turned due west, dashed across Devil Creek and headed toward the reservation. It was directly opposite to the way they wished to go, but Steve noted with sinking heart that their horses were far superior to those of either the Indians or the sheepherders. Unless they were headed they would quickly leave their pursurers in the ruck, gradually make a detour to a crossing on the Blacksnake far below, and eventually work back to where they wanted to go. Only one thing stood in their way—Steve himself.

The trail they were taking ran along the foot of Injun Knob. Could Steve get there he thought that he might—just possibly—fool them into thinking they had run head-on to another posse. If they didn't fool, then at least he would have done the best he could toward putting an end to rustling on the Devil Creek Range. He knew well the penalty he would pay if his bluff failed to work.

With slow and deliberate movements like those of an old, old man, he struggled into the saddle. Freckles, usually high-strung and bounding into the air at the first touch to the stirrup, seemed now to comprehend and waited as docilely as a work-horse until Steve was ready to go. Then he sidled down off the Knob velvet-footedly as a cat with no more jar to Steve than he would have felt if he were in a rocking-chair.

They reached the trail and Steve rolled off. He slipped the bridle from the horse and petted the glossy neck.

"You are sure a horse, old-timer," he said, "no matter what your boss may be. I don't want you to git in the way of any bullets so I'm turnin' you loose. Better make yourself scarce."

The horse walked away a few feet and watched the cowboy inquiringly.

Steve crawled behind a stump and waited for the rustlers. He could feel the fever rising, but he savagely fought back the tendency to delirium it brought. At last he heard the pounding of horses' feet, and brought his six-shooter into readiness.

And then he heard an exultant burst of yells, and a band of at least forty men swept into the trail a short distance below him. Even at that distance he could identify the two leaders as Bob Logan and Bishop Compton.

"Hurrah for Bob and the Bishop," Steve yelled feebly.

Then it dawned upon him that he could not see the finish of the chase unless he could get back to the top of the Knob. To move his leg was by this time nothing but excruciating agony. He looked around and Freckles was still where he had turned him loose, still looking at him with tender inquiry.

"Freckles, come here," Steve called.

The horse looked doubtful until Steve held out the bridle and repeated the command. Then he walked up unhesitatingly. Steve slipped the bridle on, climbed to the top of the stump, and from there to the horse's back.

"We've got to git to the top, Freckles, we've just gotta," he murmured white faced.

After what seemed ages to the cowboy they regained the top of Injun Knob. He could see every detail of the drama being enacted on the flats below. He dared not risk unconsciousness again by getting off the horse so he gripped the horn with both hands, and while Freckles stood as immovable as a statue, he watched with thrilled eyes the action below.

The rustlers were now in the center of a triangle, and their only possible way out was to fight their way through. They splashed through the creek again and headed straight for the sheepherders. Would the line hold, Steve wondered. There were not half as many herders as there were rustlers. Before the outlaws were in revolver shooting-distance the stern, quiet men of the desert slipped from their horses, knelt, and began to pick off the horses from under the rustlers with their rifles with unerring markmanship.

It was frightful and Steve, the horse lover, shuddered as he saw horse after horse fall, but he knew it was good strategy as it destroyed the last possible chance for the outlaws to escape. He saw the rustlers mill around on foot for a moment like a herd of frightened sheep before they held up their hands. Then he saw the three bands of their captors closing in, and he knew that the battle was over.

All at once it became difficult for him to see. He tried mightily to keep his self-control, but his nerveless fingers slackened around the saddle horn, and he tumbled to the ground in a pathetic heap.

CHAPTER XXIII

ORTEGA SPEAKS

STEVE came to himself with a gasp as he felt a deluge of ice-cold water strike his face. He looked up to see War-Jack and Schoolboy grinning at him, showing as much pleasure as an Indian ever deigns to show. Then he became conscious that some one was working with his wounded leg. He raised his head, and his eyes widened in astonishment as they fell upon Jennie Gibbs.

"Well, how do you feel?" she asked matter-of-factly.

"Purty good," he said vaguely, the words meaningless to him. "How do you feel?"

"Not bad," she smiled.

He began to comprehend his surroundings better.

"How'd you come here?" he asked interestedly.

"I came with Bishop Compton's party that was after the rustlers," she informed.

"Meanin' me?" he asked quizzically.

"They started for you—that's why I came along. But they learned better in time for them to help round up the real rustlers."

"But why did you come, too?" he persisted.

"Well, I happened to be the only one who dared oppose Bishop Compton's authority, and I wasn't going to have an innocent man lynched. But it wasn't me that did anything; it was all Bob."

"And you thought all the time I wasn't a rustler?"

"Of course. But Bob is the man for you to be thankful to. When he came to see me, and found that Dutch Jake had already told me about the doctored brands he knew it was a plant, so he went right back to fight with you when the posse came. Then he found the note in your war-bag and came back with it to meet us. Oh, he is a real man!" Jennie exclaimed.

"I know—I expected him to act that way—but you—why did you do it?" he pressed.

"Why—why I knew you just couldn't be a rustler," the girl said.

A rich blush momentarily crossed her features.

Steve lay back and let the knowledge that she had always had faith in him soak in. Suddenly he raised himself upon his elbow, and looking squarely into the girl's eyes asked—

"Jennie, what about Walker?"

"If a man ever has hysterics, Adrian is having them now," she replied. "The last I saw of him he was going with the sheep-herders to inspect the hole in the rock that you found, and swearing that no such place existed."

Steve needed to ask no more to know Walker's standing. Jennie was, as he had once told Bob, "a man's woman," and Walker as a man had failed to make the mark. Besides, Steve read in the girl's gaze that rested upon him much more than pity or tenderness.

"Jennie," he said diffidently, "it's no use for me to ask for that foreman's job now—a better man than me is holding it down—but do you suppose you could use another man, a handy man about the house or something?"

"Yes, Steve, I think I could," she said softly. "I am tired of trying to run a cattle outfit, even with a capable foreman."

The two Indians watching with unbounded curiosity prevented the usual demonstration, but Steve and Jennie clasped hands with perfect understanding.

"These Indian boys have rigged up a stretcher between their horses and we must get you into it and to the ranch as quickly as possible," Jennie said briskly.

"No stretcher for me," Steve poohpoohed the idea. "Help me on to that Freckles horse, an' I can ride."

Very reluctantly she assented, but presently they were on their way toward Trail Creek. On the main trail they found Bishop Compton and his party guarding the captured rustlers. The Indians and the sheep-herders had all gone quietly about their business, with the exception of Al Young.

Compton, Young, and Bob Logan came to meet them.

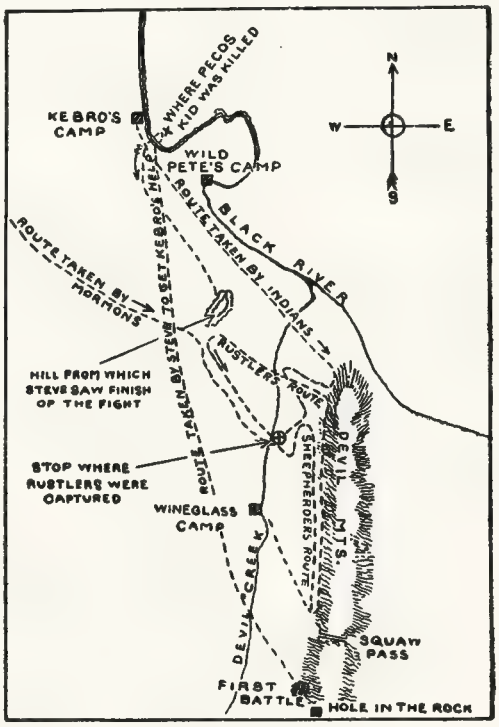
"Git off that horse," the bishop ordered. "I've sent for buckboards to haul in the dead and wounded. They'll soon be here."

"Wild Pete—has he been attended to?" Steve asked.

"He has," Compton said; then he went on solemnly, "The Lord has this day delivered our enemies into our hands——"

"All of 'em?" Steve interrupted practically.

"The two main squeezes have got away," Bob Logan spoke up quietly. "They are Fink and Metcalf. When the bunch broke camp they found those two missin'. Sneaked off by themselves because they knew if there was trouble the main crowd would catch it. We got the whole story from Dutch Jake."



"Then Ortega wasn't a rustler?" Steve asked. "Where is he?" he demanded of Al Young.

"I dunno. He left us afoot—said he had business to 'tend to."

"I told you to keep him with you," Steve said sharply.

"Why, I never thought you meant him to be a prisoner. If he ain't a rustler what do you want him for?" Young asked, perplexed.

"Listen, you people," Steve said quietly. "You all know there has been several brutal murders on this range this spring. Regardless of whether Ortega is a rustler or not, he is the man that's committed them murders.

I've promised to kill that man, and I'm going to—or be killed. He's coming up the trail there, and I'm going to meet him. I want no interference."

With one accord they all turned. Ortega was indeed coming up the trail.

"Steve!" Jennie cried in protest.

"Not for you, Jennie," he said quietly. "My promise has been given to a dead man, and it will be kept."

There was a quality in his determination which seemed to leave them helpless. He rode slowly down the trail unmolested until he was face to face with the Mexican.

"Ortega," Steve said as they met, "this time you don't dodge the issue. Right now you atone for draggin' Wild Pete's boy to death—unless you can prove to me that you didn't do it. If you can't I'll count three, an' then I'll shoot."

He waited for the Mexican to reply.

"Before you kill me," Ortega said, "I want to say that there is two men over by the hole-in-the-rock whom I have killed. They are Metcalf and Fink. Ask the bishop to bury them—and I'd like to say good-by to my horse."

Steve looked down at Freckles who was straining at the bit in an endeavor to reach his master. Steve had completely forgotten that he was still riding the Mexican's horse.

"—— your soul, Ortega," he cried with tears of baffled rage in his voice, "I can't kill you in cold blood. Why don't you fight—or explain?"

"I shall do neither," Ortega said calmly.

There was a flurry of swiftly running horses' feet, and a moment later Jennie and Bob dashed up, their faces white and strained.

"Steve, Steve, there has been a mistake!" Jennie cried breathlessly. "It was not Ortega that killed those men. It was the Pecos Kid."

"How do you know that?" Steve demanded eagerly.

"Dutch Jake just told us," the girl informed.

"The man that committed those murders carried a horsehair rope, an' talked Mexican," Steve insisted stubbornly.

"Mr. Ortega, won't you explain?" Jennie pleaded.

"Have they captured the Pecos Kid?" Ortega asked.

"I shot him," Steve said bluntly.

The Mexican bowed his head—

"It was very fitting," he said with an air of unexpressible sadness. "Since it seems the tangle can not be unraveled otherwise I shall explain. The Pecos Kid was the murderer, and it was he who tried to assassinate Steve."

"But he cussed in Spanish," Steve objected.

"Very true; but it is not strange that he could, seeing he was half-Mexican—like myself," Ortega said dryly.

"Half Mexican!" they chorused.

"We were brothers," Ortega proceeded. "Our father was Mexican, or rather Spanish, our mother American. We were both born and raised in the United States. Our parents died several years ago and I did my best for my brother, but I guess there was a degenerate streak in him somewhere. However, I might have done something with him but he fell in with this man Metcalf. He came to this country with Metcalf, and last Fall I followed to keep an eye on him.

"You see the cattle that I am supposed to be looking after for an outfit in litigation with the Wineglass are really my own property. I bought the equity in them to be near my brother.

"But about the murders. I found the Pecos Kid, as he preferred to be called, completely under the influence of Metcalf. Being a coward at heart Metcalf was deliberately using my brother's skill with a gun to cover his own cowardice. But until Steve told me this morning I was not sure that it was my brother who was responsible for those killings. I remembered that he had borrowed my horsehair rope the day the Indian boy was dragged to death and then I knew.

"Yesterday, I learned from another source, that Metcalf was encouraging my brother to attain greater skill with the revolver so that he might kill me. I believe I was marked for the next victim. Under the circumstances you may imagine my relief that it was my friend Steve who was chosen to relieve the earth of this incumbrance instead of myself."

There was no mistaking the man's sincerity.

"Then," Steve said, "that proposition that you wanted to make to me after they made that bogus count was——"

"Simply that we join forces. I had long suspected that there was some rustling being done; but I thought that it was by the Bucketbail men. I knew, too, that you had your

suspicions in other quarters, and I felt that we might reach a solution sooner if we would join forces. You see I never knew that you suspected me of those murders."

"An' I never dreamed you were after the rustlers," Steve remarked. "But what I'd like to know is—how did you happen to be at the Hole-in-the-rock this mornin'?"

"I caught Bill Cummins blotching a brand, and I terrorized him into telling me the truth about the rustling. I was amazed at the scope of it, and I wanted nothing so much as to make Metcalf answer to me for dragging my brother so low, and even then I did not know what a degenerate he had become. So I foolishly allowed Cummins to go, after making him promise to keep quiet, and I started after Metcalf. Before I found him however, Cummins went to Fink and told him the story. Fink promptly hanged Cummins as a mark of gratitude, and they picked up my trail at once. Before I knew it they were on my heels, and had me treed where you found me," Ortega explained.

Steve rode up and extended his hand.

"Ortega," he said soberly, "no man livin' hates to eat dirt worse than I do, but I will when I know I'm in the wrong."

"With the evidence you had you could not have done otherwise," Ortega replied quietly. "I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never repay. It was a pleasure for me to settle with Metcalf. Fink was but a cowardly snake to be stepped upon. But the Pecos Kid, ah, that would have been different. Yet, after the truth was known, what else could I have done but remove him in the way I did those others? He was my brother."

They heard the rattle of buckboards up the trail.

"Bob, help me off," Steve directed.

When he was on the ground Steve passed the bridle reins to Ortega.

"He is a wonderful horse, this Freckles," he said.

Then, with a tone vibrant with sympathy, he continued:

"You will find it within twenty feet of the river, three or four miles below Wild Pete's camp. If I wasn't all shot up I'd go help you."

"I'll go," Bob volunteered.

"Thanks," Ortega said gratefully; "but I prefer to go alone."

He started to ride away, but stopped to speak to Jennie.

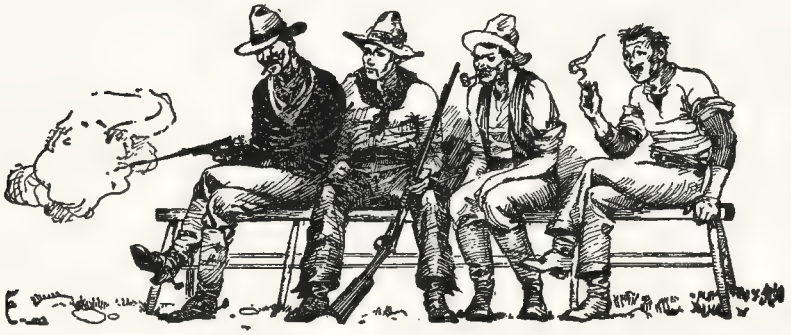
"I learned from Cummins," he said, "that the rustling has been practically at a standstill because of Steve's activities. It had been decided to hold up operations until he could be eliminated. You will not be out nearly so many cattle as you perhaps thought."

They watched him disappear down the trail.

"Well, Steven," Bob Logan said to break the silence, "you come to this country lookin' fer excitement. Have you had a plenty?"

Steve looked down at Jennie, who was now beside him.

"I'm satisfied, Bob," he said happily. "Plumb satisfied."



HULLABALOO

By Alan B. LeMay

WITH softly dipping oars and muffled oar-pegs two men rowed easily across the greasy black water of Guataya harbor, knowing their way by the occasional hulks that rose above them, blotting out the stars. The boat moved slowly; twenty minutes passed before the men rested on their oars just under the yellow bow-light of a stodgy freighter.

For a few moments they paused, listening intently. From the wharf came the rhythmic malharmony of a chanted song; there was a rusty grating of steel on steel as the tramp steamer *Cordelia* sagged against her cable under the caress of the light swell. On the ship itself there was silence.

Then Bill Hardy swung the boat under the steamer's cable; the other man, Steve McKay, shifted into the stern-sheets and grasped the cable as they came within reach. In a moment McKay swung his full weight on to the sloping steel strand, and the boat drifted from under his feet.

Hand over hand Steve went up the cable, shoulder muscles bunching and knotting. At the top he paused, gripped the line with one knee and hung, resting and listening, not a yard below the rail.

There was a step on the deck above him; Steve clamped more tightly to the steep cable, and flattened himself as closely as he could against the vessel's side. The footsteps paused above his head, and for a long moment there was no further sound; the man on the hawser, tense and motionless, was ready to drop at any moment into the sea. Then the watch above stirred, and Steve, hearing the shuffle of the sailor's feet, knew the man was leaning against the rail. If he should turn and look down——

At best, Steve's errand was an uncertain one. There was supposed to be a man on the *Cordelia* who had nearly every cent that Steve and Bill owned. If Steve could get quietly aboard and find this man—alone, if possible—he felt that he could recover at least a part of what was his and Bill's. But how?

Steve McKay and Bill Hardy had knocked about Central America for two years before they made any money. Considering Steve's absent-minded carelessness and Bill's hotheadedness, it is a wonder that they ever made any. But they had finally managed to engineer a lucky trading deal, in which they cleaned up all of five thousand dollars.

Their plan, of course, was to get out of Guataya, the little Central American port where they happened to be, and back to New York as quickly as possible to blow the roll. And they would have wasted no time in carrying this out, had it not been for a moon-faced stranger named Bailey, who was thrust into the same room with them when they stopped overnight at the Hotel Americano.

When Steve and Bill awoke in the middle of the next day Bailey was gone. So, it seemed, was the five thousand dollars.

In Guataya you do not appeal to the police in such a case, for that is worse than useless. You take your loss philosophically;

or you go out to get your money back in whatever way you can. Bill and Steve most emphatically decided on the latter course: They went out to get it back.

A LIGHT tapping on the rail above told Steve that the watch was knocking out his pipe. Steve was beginning to feel the strain of his precarious position. His shoulders ached; the cable dragged at the skin of his hands and bit into the back of his knee. The sailor hummed and muttered to himself, and the scratch of a match sounded as the unseen man fired up his smoke.

The strain became worse moment by moment. How long he had been hanging there Steve did not know, but it seemed an interminable period. He knew that soon he must slide down the cable and swim for it, but with dogged tenacity he hung on. He closed his eyes and counted silently—at fifty he would let go.

There was no sound from above until he almost decided that the man was gone; then a faint shuffle on the deck assured him that the watch was still there. His counting reached fifty, with no change in the situation. He decided that he could count another twenty-five.

The man on the deck moved away; when Steve could no longer hear the sauntering footsteps he swung free the leg that gripped the cable, and hung at full length by his hands. Up, up, he forced his aching muscles to pull him. With a quick movement he obtained a new hand hold for his stiff fingers.

He was on the deck, temples pulsating. A dizzy slinking rush took him to the shadow of the pilot house, and he leaned there, rubbing his shoulders and stretching his numb hands. For moments he did not move.

Now that he was aboard, the riskiest part of his job was just ahead of him. Steve took off his shoes and listened dubiously to the slow step of the watch. The man was approaching, wandering forward.

The footsteps paused. Then Steve heard them descend the ladder into the forecastle, and he seized the chance to slide aft along the rail, past the hatches and stubby funnel, some thirty paces to the after-cabin. He gained the ladder, ducked down the few steep steps, and waited in the shadow of a narrow passage. There was silence.

At first he could make out nothing in the darkness. He risked a match, shielding its flare in his hands, and found the doors of four cramped cabins. The forward cabin to starboard was open and apparently empty. He advanced to the second door as the match went out. With infinite caution he tried the latch. It was locked.

Groping, Steve found another door. It yielded, and he felt his way softly toward the probable position of the bunks. He was halted by a sudden voice, close by him in the dark. It was thick, but wide awake.

"It's on the table, Fred."

Steve recovered himself and emitted a neutral grunt, shuffling his feet. One of his outstretched hands found the edge of a table. Hurriedly he fumbled across its surface. His hand crept over papers, a ledger, a pipe, a flask, a ring of keys—he slipped the keys into his pocket and made for the door.

"Find it?" asked the voice. "Go easy!"

To go easy was Steve's foremost intention. He grunted again and slid out, closing the door behind him. If his man were only bunking alone in one of the other cabins, perhaps a bluff of some sort— He wondered if he could be sure of recognizing Bailey's voice if it came out of the dark as the other had.

The next door was also unlocked, and heavy breathing guided him toward the bunk. As his shielded match blazed, a swarthy man, hairy of chest, blinked up at him.

"That you, Alf?"

"Lookin' for my pipe," explained Steve in the tones of the previous voice in the dark.

He found his way out. Only the locked cabin remained. He wondered if fortune had left the key inside in such a position that it could be forced out of the lock; that was his only chance.

He listened minutes before the last door before he made the trial. Then he began to probe gingerly into the keyhole with one of the keys he had found in the other cabin. The inner key yielded, then jammed; then suddenly it gave way, and fell clattering inside the door. Fortune was kind! There was no sound to indicate that any one had been disturbed.

One of the keys on the ring unlocked the door. Quietly, carefully, Steve eased the last door slowly open—so slowly that its chronic squawk spoke in a series of tiny

distinct sounds—"*Tick-tick*—pause—*tick!*" At last he could edge his way into the stuffy black hole.

He could hear the regular breathing of a sleeper. An odor of Jamaica rum told him that the sleeper was not likely to be disturbed, but he nevertheless moved forward cautiously. It was difficult in the dark to keep the perfect balance he needed; the faint lift and fall of the ship seemed to unsteady him. He felt that he must be beside the bunk.

Digging up another match, Steve clicked his thumb-nail across its head. The match-end snapped off and dropped in a fizzing flare. The sleeper stirred, turned over. In the thick black Steve heard the invisible man raise himself on an elbow not a yard, not an arm's length, from where Steve stood.

The man in the bunk blew his nose, while Steve stood motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. A bit at a time the other subsided, until at the end of many minutes his breathing was again quiet and regular. Steve tried another match, hiding the light in the lantern-like cup of his hands.

For a moment Steve's own eyes were dazzled by the sudden yellow light of the flame. Then he saw, in the dim glow that seeped through his fingers, that the face of the sleeping man was upturned, large and moon-like. A thrill shot through Steve. The man on the bunk was Bailey!

He put out a hand to shake the man's shoulder—then drew it back. It occurred to Steve that the stolen money was probably being carried in some form of belt, worn under the man's clothes. If that were true, and he could get the thief's money-belt before waking him, much difficulty might be avoided.

The match burned his fingers, forcing him to blow it out, but he knew the lay of the land now. Steve reached forward and very lightly ran a forefinger along the man's undershirt. Yes, the belt he expected was there, buckled outside the garment. He dug for his pocket-knife.

The man stirred, and the searcher paused for a moment. Then with a smooth movement Steve slipped the knife under the pocketed belt and severed the canvas. He wrenched it from under the man's body as Bailey woke.

"What in ——"

Belt in hand, Steve dashed out of the cabin and up the ladder to the deck. A yell went up behind him, and sounds of stumbling feet. Steve whistled shrilly through his teeth to Bill as he dodged around the cabin.

Bill was to have waited near by in the shadow of another ship until he heard Steve's whistle, then row hard to the stern of the *Cordelia* to pick up his partner. But Steve must give Bill time to make the stern—splashing about in the harbor would not do.

He stumbled over a coil of line, and with a quick movement heaved it over the rail. Its splash he thought might confuse the pursuit and give him time. Then he rolled under a handy tarpaulin.

There were men gathering about him; he heard the watch move up on the run, his lantern banging against his thigh—

"Wot's up—wot's up?"

Hurried explanations in more than one tongue; an excited voice contending that "the duffer went over the side—I heard the splash!" Scuffling and pounding of feet; riot, pandemonium and hullabaloo!

With the center of excitement at the stern rail Steve knew that he could not take to the water there. He picked his chance, slid out of cover, and padded at a noiseless run to the bow. The muggy water closed over his head as he slid down the cable; then he struck out on a line which he hoped would intercept his boat as it moved to pick him up at the stern. He earnestly hoped, as he peered across the surface of the black water, that there were no sharks in the harbor that night.

A dory had put out from the *Cordelia*, and a dim yellow spotlight waved about in the dark. Steve raised himself in the water in an effort to locate Bill's boat, and the shifting spotlight missed him narrowly. The *Cordelia's* dory was blundering toward him.

Swearing through a mouthful of salt water, Steve changed his direction to keep out of the dory's way. Then the spotlight found him, and there was a thick cry:

"There he is! Now *pull!*"

HE WAS a matter of yards from the steamer. Steve decided that it would not be impossible to dive under the ship and come up on the other side—it was his only chance. He ducked and swam down, down. Visions of sharks of vast size beset him as he swam deeper and deeper into the black depths far below the surface.

Less than a minute of this told Steve that he would not be able to make it. He seemed to lose direction under the dark water; he couldn't even find the hull of the steamer. His head pounded. He gave it up and struck upward for the surface.

He came up almost under the dory; a badly feathered oar struck him a stunning blow as he broke the surface. Before he could dive again Steve was dragged into the tipping dory. For a moment he lay quiet, gasping for breath; then hands gripped his arms, his throat, as he gained his knees.

"Steve! Hey, Steve——"

Bill was coming up with splashing oars.

Steve answered inarticulately as he struck out savagely with right and left.

There was a heavy splash close by, and the water rushed over the side as a new weight grappled the boat. Steve knew that Bill had gone into action. In an instant the dory was over, and Steve struggled free in the water. At the end of a half-minute's blind tangle he gripped the stern-board of his boat.

"*Quien?*" snarled Bill, already out of the water.

"Steve!" he answered, and was helped to scramble aboard.

Seizing an oar, Steve smashed a clutching hand that sought to tip the boat. Bill was fending off another boarder in the bow while swinging the boat about. Steve was bringing an oar down on another hand that gripped the stern when a choking voice stopped him.

"For God's sake! *I can't swim!*"

A burbling white face appeared in the water, and Steve dragged aboard a heavy, floundering body. The rescued man collapsed gasping in the bottom as Bill found his oar-pegs and pulled away with churning strokes.

Gray light was beginning to show in the east as they neared the wharf. Suddenly through the dimness Steve recognized the face of the wet man now sitting up in the stern-sheets. It was Bailey!

Triumphantly Steve shook the belt in the other's face.

"Figured to move out on us, didn't you?" he taunted. "No, sir! Not on your homely tintype! And since you're with us now, your address may as well change to City Hoosegow, Guataya, for the next few centuries, old son!"

"I don't know what the Sam Hill you're talking about," protested Bailey, coming to life.

"If I figure correct," said Steve, feeling the bulging pockets of the dripping belt, "this here belt contains about five thousand berries—acquired not so long ago by you from us. Besides which——"

"That belt," snapped Bailey, "now has in it paper money valued at exactly two dollars and a half at the present rate of exchange. And if I had knew that was all you got I wouldn't never have followed you off the ship."

"I don't fall," returned Steve. "We know just how you worked the deal. Havin' watched us, you knew right where we kept our roll, and then——"

"Sure I knew," Bailey announced. "You handle money like a dough-head. But if I *had* wanted your lousy jack, how would I have got into that double-locked trunk?"

"Oh, I guess you knew that it was in the suit-case, not the trunk, all right," commented Bill.

"Well, it wasn't," Bailey contradicted. "This bird—" indicating Steve—"was just moving it into the trunk when I came in. A roll like twenty dollars' worth of confetti," he added by way of identification.

"Oh, no, he didn't," sneered Bill.

"Oh, yes, he did," Bailey sneered back.

"It was in the suit-case, all right," said Steve. "I——"

Then suddenly he paused, and a blank look came into his face.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed.

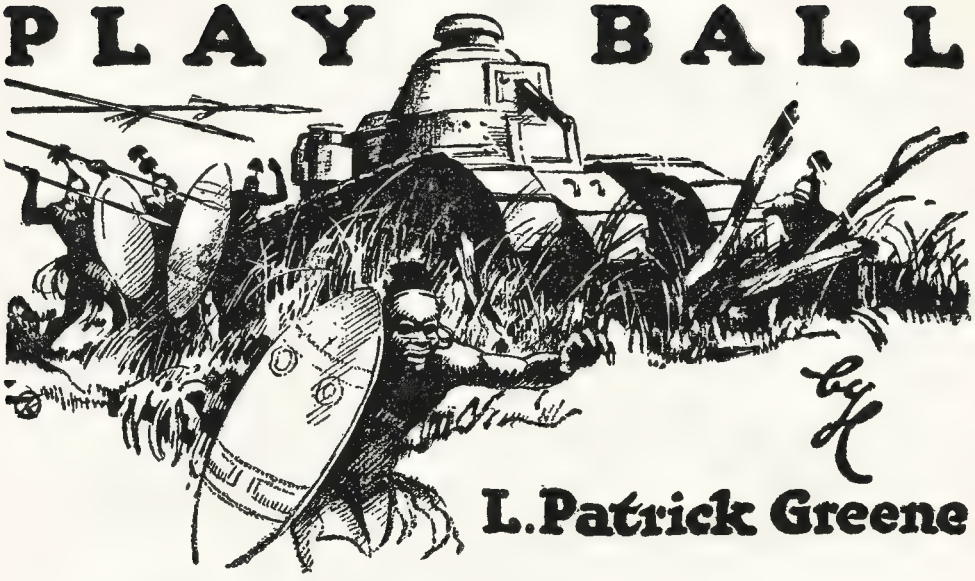
"What's wrong?" Bill demanded.

"Did you look in the trunk at all," Steve asked Bill in a queer voice, "before we decided Bailey had got away with it?"

"Of course not," said Bill. "The trunk was standin' locked in the corner, and we both remember the money bein' in the suit-case."

"Then it's on me," said Steve weakly. "I remember now. I moved the money into the trunk just before we turned in!"

PLAY BALL



L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Tools," "The Charm," etc.

A CAPE TOWN to Cairo railroad was once the dream of empire builders. When that is accomplished, they said, the conquest of Africa will be complete.

Since the conclusion of the war, that dream has been dwarfed by the bigger vision of an aeroplane service between "the world's wickedest city" and the Cape.

As evidence that this dream will shortly be a reality, witness the chain of aerodromes and emergency landing places—some two hundred miles apart—stretching north and south across the face of the Dark Continent.

At some future date some one well qualified for the task will write a book describing the difficulties, the romances, the tragedies, involved in the building of these air stations. That book will be worth reading, for some of the aerodromes are located in the heart of the jungle where the menace of wild beasts is a very real one; where fever and that dreaded scourge, the sleeping sickness, are an ever present threat.

Savage tribes, who previous to the invasion of the aerodrome builders had never seen a white man, and who had looked upon their advent as a "working of evil Spirits," have been peacefully brought under subjection; having viewed at first hand the wonder workings of the white man, they freely acknowledge his supremacy.

It may well be, however, that the historian, viewing this monumental achievement as a whole, will omit from his narration certain isolated incidents which now stand out like the facets of a diamond.

Here's a case in point.

MPHOENGS, the Chief of a District, a jungle-choked district, in northeastern Rhodesia, was one of the few surviving rulers of the old order. Isolated as he was—his chief kraal was in the heart of an almost impenetrable jungle—the widespread fingers of an advancing civilization had not touched him, and Mphoengs ruled his people as his forefathers had before him; it was a rule of bloodshed and gross materialism.

Ten thousand people owed, and gave, full allegiance to him; ten thousand people—men, women and children—drew breath and lived because the Chief graciously willed it. The heavy taxes he levied were met; the cruel tortures he imposed on men and women, were endured patiently, almost uncomplainingly, because he was the appointed ruler and high in the favor of the Spirits. Perhaps some part of his autocratic power was due to his *impi*, his special regiment of warriors called the Slayers; the warriors were quick to avenge the Chief should any dare to question his will.

Mphoengs was the only judge; his only sentence—"Death." There was no Court of Appeal.

Second only in power to Mphoengs was Mopa, the Witch Doctor. He was greatly hated and feared by the people; he was a man of dark sayings and darker deeds. Yet because he was a worker of magic, a man who spoke with the voice of the Spirits, and a little perhaps because he had the ear of Mphoengs, men paid him homage and essayed to placate him with costly gifts.

When the son, the only son, of the Chief died, Mopa announced that it was the work of evil Spirits and a "smelling out" of the evil ones was held. Ten men, lesser rulers of the District, were "touched" by Mopa and they, their wives and children, were put to death; their kraals destroyed and their cattle added to the herds of the Chief and Mopa.

But not yet were the Spirits satisfied.

Mphoengs ordered "that a time of mourning" should be held.

"For the space of three days and three nights," he said, "the cries and lamentations of my people shall ascend to the Land of the Spirits; and, it may well be, the Great Ones, hearing their cries, will open the doors of their dread abode that the soul of my son may go in."

The order went forth; the land became a place of desolation. The Slayers constantly patrolled the kraals of the land, and to those who could not weep came death. The dry racking sobs that mark the end of a fit of weeping, were not sufficient evidence of mourning; the tears must flow. Women whose tears had dried up or found it difficult to mourn for the death of the Chief's son, found fresh cause, good cause, as they gazed upon the bodies of their own children—killed because *they* could not cry; and at the approach of the Slayers, pinched hard the children left to them that tears might flow and their lives be spared.

Nor were the men free from the fear of death. Some by slyly taking copious doses of snuff, induced the tears to flow; but even so the assagais of the Slayers sought out the heart of many a man during the period of mourning.

Only the Chief and Mopa, the Witch Doctor, remained dry eyed.

"It is not meet," said Mphoengs, "that I should give way to tears, becoming weak, even as a woman. I am the Chief; because of the greatness of my soul, I can hide the grief that is within me. But ye, my people, how can I know that you truly mourn if the tears do not flow from your eyes?"

Then turning with a cat-like swiftness upon one of his Councillors who was at that moment smiling at the antics of a babe toddling beside its mother, Mphoengs said mildly:

"Yet I can almost weep for thee, O Marka. What! Canst not mourn for the child that has gone from me? But thou hast always been a faithful warrior and I can find it in my heart to forgive thee."

The tears rolled down his fat cheeks as he gazed reproachfully at the terrorized man.

"Take thy assagai," he continued, pointing at the child, "and slay that which causes thee to forget that thy Chief mourns the death of his son."

And Marka, content to have so lightly escaped the anger of the Chief, took up his spear and hastened toward the child.

The Chief watched idly, unheedful of the agonized pleas of the woman.

"Thou hast done a good deed, Marka," said Mphoengs when the Councillor returned to his side. "The child hath gone to watch over the Spirit of my son—for whom the woman now truly mourns."

No! Not easily will the people of the kraals forget the Time of Mourning.

THE Time of Mourning was at an end. Many had died; the assagais of the Slayers had drunk deeply of blood; the Chief and Mopa were well content.

The dead ones were the men and their families who had dared to murmur against the rule of Mphoengs; men who had planned to rebel: to call upon the white men for aid. And because all the thorns had been removed from his path, the Chief ordered that a feast of rejoicing should be held; that the people who had mourned must now laugh.

In answer to the call all the people of the district came to the big kraal of the Chief. The women had brewed vast quantities of beer, and the days were spent in drinking and dancing; in singing of songs honoring the Great Spirits; in shouting the praises of the Chief and Mopa, the Witch Doctor.

While the lustful rites of a savage people were at their height, came civilization.

"Strangers are coming, O Elephant,"

reported a scout. "Many white men and black dogs, armed with the sticks of fire, are close at hand."

"Of a surety, O Great One," panted a second, "they have come to eat us up. Monster creatures—headless, and without legs—the like of which no man has ever witnessed, are with them. Trees bow down before them, ant hills are leveled, the thorn bush is destroyed."

"Even now they come," cried a third.

As he spoke a clanking, crashing sound came from the jungle beyond the large

clearing which surrounded the kraal, and, a moment later, two caterpillar tractors—tanks—lumbered into view.

With wondering amazement the people watched the uncouth monsters. The warriors—five hundred strong—lined up in war-like formation before the kraal.

A hundred paces from the kraal the tanks halted and a white man climbed stiffly out of one of them.

"We come in peace, O Chief," he cried.

"That is well, white man, for otherwise you would not now be speaking."

The Chief's voice quavered, for all his brave words.

The white man smiled.

"I am grateful for thy mercy. Now I would ask a boon."

"Name it."

The Chief was more at ease now. He could deal with seekers after advancement.

"I, and the people who are with me yonder," the white man waved his hand toward the jungle, "would stay here a little while."

"To what end?"

"We make ready a house for a giant bird which carries men on its back. I bring you many gifts from the white overlord; your young men shall work for us and we will pay them well."

"I would hear more of this bird you talk of," replied Mphoengs, but before the white man could answer the Witch Doctor cried shrilly:

"Believe not these liars. They are workers of evil; they seek to take this land unto themselves. Put them to death. They are but few."

"You have heard the voice of the Spirits," said the Chief slowly. "I have no desire to share my country with the whites. I pass my word and it is obeyed by my children. You white men would teach them to put me to scorn. Therefore—get you gone before I loose my warriors upon you."

He raised his right hand holding the miniature assagai—the symbol of his rank. The warriors looked at him, waiting for the signal—the casting of the spear—which would mean war.

"We do not seek war," said the white man calmly. "Neither do we intend to set thy people against thee. In no way will we interfere with thy rule. We will go our way; you and your people shall go your way. Only remains this to be said. There must be no blood shed, no slaying of women and children; no 'smelling out' and evil deeds of witchcraft. Such things we can not stomach. Elsewise——"

"What further proof need you?" cried Mopa. "Said I not that they would take all power from you, O Chief?"

The warriors commenced to sing the war chant. A loud booming note filled the air as they beat their bullock-hide shields with their assagais.

The white man climbed slowly into the tractor.

"I came in peace," he shouted as the Chief threw down his spear, and the warriors rushed to the attack, "but, if you must have war—so be it."

The little door of the tank closed and a moment later, creaking and groaning, the

two tanks lumbered forward to meet the attack.

Assagais rattled harmlessly on the armored plate as, surrounded by a horde of wildly yelling warriors, the two tanks went on toward the kraal.

There was a loud crashing of timbers as the stockade went down before their onslaught; nothing could stop them; on they went, smashing through huts, until they came to the Council Place where was situated the hut of the Chief.

"Is there any one in the Chief's hut?" a voice called from the belly of the "monster."

It sounded to the now terrified natives like the voice of a giant.

"We do not wish to kill," continued the voice. "We came in peace; you preferred war. Now watch."

A stream of fire shot from the tanks, and a moment later the hut of the Chief was in flames.

"Are you ready to parley, O Chief?" called the voice. "Or must we put fire to thy whole village?"

"It is enough, white man," replied the Chief in an awed voice. "We will obey thy commands in all things. Indeed——"

Mphoengs looked around for Mopa, but that crafty man had fled into the maze of the bush when the first attack on the "monsters" had failed.

"Indeed," continued the Chief, "I would have done so in the first place had it not been for the evil counsel of Mopa. Will his death appease you?"

"There shall be no blood shed," replied the voice sternly.

"It is an order."

The Chief's voice was meek but, as he glared around at his warriors, many cringed before his glance.

THE building of the aerodrome progressed apace. Quarters for the air men; huts for the native laborers; supply stations and offices, appeared almost overnight. The clearing about the kraal was leveled—anthills removed, scrub bush uprooted—by hundreds of Mphoengs' people working under the direction of a few white men. It was a scene of indescribable confusion.

Motor lorries, driven by reckless, iron-nerved drivers, brought supplies from the nearest base, traversing the road made through the jungle by the tractors; the cries of white men mingled with the guttural voices of natives; whistled signals sounded shrilly above the clanking of tractors.

But soon, very soon, out of chaos appeared order. All was finished. Over the field-telephone the report was made that the aerodrome at Mphoengs was completed, and the builders moved on to fresh scenes of endeavor, leaving behind them two white men to await the coming of the aeroplane.

IT WOULD be hard to find two men more diametrically opposed than Young and Smithers, the two white men left in charge at Mphoengs.

Young—though he called himself a Canadian way back in 1914—was an American; the mentally and physically alert type of American. His head was well shaped; his chin, square cut and forceful; his frame was big and loose boned. He was quick to form and express an opinion, eagerly adopting the new, voicing loudly his contempt for the old. His spirits were in a constant state of ebullition. His head was covered with a flaming red thatch which bristled defiance to the rule of "brush and comb."

Smithers, on the other hand, was a typical Englishman belonging to the class conveniently labeled "leisured."

He was a thick-set man; muscular; lethargic in his movements, yet suggesting a latent energy; he was slow in forming opinions and rarely expressed them, even when formed; silently contemptuous of any innovation, being well content with things as they are.

His jet-black hair was always brushed back from his forehead in an immaculate pompadour. No matter how hot the day, or how strenuous his exertions, his hair—even as his life—was always unruffled; always precise and well ordered.

It would perhaps have been sufficient, in presenting the differences of these two men, to have stated simply that one was a baseball enthusiast, while the other upheld the glories of cricket.

There was little or nothing for them to do at Mphoengs save to superintend the natives, engaged daily in removing from the landing ground the scrub bush which grew up overnight. With the arrival of the first plane, of course, they would have plenty of work—the overhauling of the intricate machinery—but in the meantime the days passed very slowly.

At other aerodromes the local chief would have organized hunts in order that the white men might be entertained, and no honor would have been too great so show them. But Mphoengs bitterly resented their presence, believing them—as indeed they were—a menace to his autocratic rule. His people were ordered to hold no communication with the white men, and, save for the natives who worked on the landing field—from whom Mphoengs extracted tribute—Smithers and Young were completely isolated.

Young, having brought with him into the "back of the beyond" a baseball bat, several balls, and a pitcher's mitt—he was a pitcher of repute in the old days—essayed to initiate Smithers into the mysteries of the game.

But the Englishman would have none of it.

"Really, old chap," he drawled, "you can't expect me to take any interest in that footling game. It's nothing more or less than the game youngsters play at home. Rounders, I think they call it."

Indignant protestations rose to Young's lips, but one look at the Englishman's complacent expression showed him that further words would be useless. With a snort of disgust he went out, and contented himself with batting flys to the native laborers. When that got too expensive—he paid one cent for every fly caught—he pitched at a tin can set on the stump of a tree.

One day—a message had come through that morning on the telephone that the aeroplane would arrive on the following day—Smithers joined him as he was resting in the shade of a Mapani bush. Young was perspiring freely; the temperature was hovering around 116 degrees in the shade.

"I don't see why you want to chase around in the sun like a bally lunatic," Smithers commented mildly.

He had just returned from a seven-mile hike on the chance of "getting a pot at a croc' !"

"No. You wouldn't," Young said briefly.

"But really. It's all so childish. Why any one, with a good eye that is, could hit the ball as you throw it. Now in cricket the bowler puts a twist on the ball as it leaves his hand, so, when it touches the ground, it 'breaks' if you know what I mean. Goes off at a tangent, you know. Now that kind of ball is hard to hit."

Smithers paused, breathless, and Young stared at him in astonishment. It was the longest speech he had heard Smithers make.

"Say," he exclaimed excitedly, "I'll bet a month's pay that I can pitch you ten balls in succession and you won't hit one of them. Are you on?"

"Am I on? My dear man, it's too much like highway robbery. Why give me a few minutes to get used to the balance of this," he took the baseball bat in his hands, "and I'll wager that I could hit every ball that comes within hitting distance. Who couldn't hit a straight ball with no break?" he concluded scoffingly.

"Who said anything about a straight ball with no 'break,' as you call it, you poor nut? Get behind the stump of that tree and look over a few of the balls I send up. Unless your eyesight's on the blink, you'll see more breaks than you ever dreamed of."

"I'm too comfortable here," Smithers replied lazily. "Besides, you're only spoofin' me. You can't 'break' a ball unless it hits the ground first.

"I wonder who that old josser is?"

Smithers pointed to a gray bearded native of portly build who happened to be passing.

As the two watched him he suddenly knelt down behind the stump which had been Young's target.

"Wonder what he's doing?"

"I don't know. But look here," said Young, rising to his feet, "I'll give you an object lesson. Do you think I can hit that nigger from here?"

"Not unless you throw a 'yorker.' "

"What do you mean? Yorker?"

"Oh, a high one that'll descend perpendicularly behind the stump. It's a ten to one shot you'd miss him even then."

"Well, I'm going to hit him, and it won't be a 'yorker'."

Young commenced to wind up.

"Take a look at that," he cried as he released the ball.

"You won't even hit the stump," scoffed Smithers.

But even as he spoke the ball—Young had pitched an incurve—which had appeared to be going wide of the stump, broke in sharply. The next moment an alarmed yell proclaimed that Young had pitched a "strike."

The native, his hand caressing the injured and prominent part of his anatomy, came wrathfully from behind the stump, thus

coming face to face with an old woman whom the two white men had not previously noticed.

The effect of the meeting between the two was electrical. For a moment they stood face to face, then, as by a mutual agreement, turned and fled in opposite directions.

"Gosh! That was funny. What's it all about, Smithers?"

"The old lady was his mother-in-law, I imagine," chuckled the Englishman, "and it is part of their religion, you know, that a man is forbidden to see his wife's mother."

"I hope the old war horse isn't a big bug up at the kraal. I sure did hurt his dignity."

"You did more than that," said Smithers, sobering quickly. "You made him break one of his religious laws."

"Oh, forget it. I'll give him a big packet of tobacco. That'll mend his dignity, and salve his conscience.

"But say, did you notice that curve?"

"It was a bally fluke."

JUST what started the quarrel that night in the mess hut is hard to say. In tropical countries the tempers of men are a veritable powder-mine, needing but the slightest touch to set them off. Little faults are magnified when men's nerves are on edge. Only a little while before, a bloody fight had occurred when one man construed a simple request to "pass the salt," into a deadly insult!

But whatever the cause, it was plainly evident that Young and Smithers were at "outs."

Feelings and words ran high until, because they were both of the same bull-dog breed, they decided to settle their differences outside, in the light of the moon, with their fists.

They had hardly left the hut, however, when they were silently surrounded by a party of armed warriors, who quickly gagged and bound them securely.

Smithers, who understood and spoke the language fluently, listened carefully, but the warriors gave him no hint as to the reason of their capture.

Indeed the whole thing was accomplished in silence, and in silence the warriors carried the two white men up the hill to the kraal.

Entering a dirty, vermin infested hut, the warriors tossed the two white men on to a heap of rotten grass and left them.

The light of the moon, shining through a hole in the roof, fell full upon the faces of the two men as they sprawled side by side. It seemed as though the events of the past few minutes had but served to accentuate their anger. Each struggled with the ropes which bound him; not so much in the hope of escape, as in eagerness to finish what was started down in the mess-hut.

Finally, realizing that there was no hope of freeing themselves, they gave up their struggles. Eyes flashed messages of hate and dire threats.

Suddenly the light of anger vanished from Young's face and he shook with laughter.

Bewilderment showed in the face of Smithers; then he, too, began to laugh.

After a little while they slept.

THE following morning they were carried, still bound and gagged, before the Chief.

Mphoengs was a gross, fat man. His eyes continually twinkled with evil cunning. The smile on his face was belied by the cruel set of his mouth.

At his right hand sat the portly stranger who had served as a target for Young the previous day. The Chief's bodyguard lined the Council place.

"Remove the gags," Mphoengs ordered, "that I may talk with my friends, the white men; and they with me."

"What would you do with us?" Smithers demanded as soon as he was able to speak.

"What would I do with you?" Mphoengs answered in a tone of mild surprize. "Say rather, what have you done to us?"

"We have obeyed thy wishes in all things, O Chief. Not once, until now brought here by the warriors, have we set foot in thy kraal. Neither have we sought to hold speech with thy people."

"So? Then our feeling toward you should be one of friendship, instead of hate. Yet we would listen to what Mopa, the Dread Lord of Life and Death, has to say concerning you."

As the portly stranger rose to his feet the two white men noticed that he wore the necklace of snakes' fangs and human teeth, proclaiming that he was a Witch Doctor of repute.

"What did I say, O people of Mphoengs," he cried in a high, piping voice, "when the first white men came hither with their cursed wonder workings? Said I not that evil

would befall this kraal and that the hut of Mphoengs, the Chief, would be shaken at its foundations?"

"Aye, O Mopa," answered the warriors in a mighty chorus. "So we recall thy words."

"I did wrong to doubt thee, O Mopa," Mphoengs interjected.

"Truly thou did'st a great wrong, O Fat One," screamed Mopa turning on the Chief.

"For the sake of gain thou did'st listen to the words of the white men, turning thy back on the traditions, and a deaf ear unto my warnings. And so in disgust I went away from this place, leaving you to pay the price of folly.

"When I return once again to dwell among ye, what do I find? That ye have swallowed the lies of the white men, who have told you that they command the Spirits; that they can fly through the air. Long have these white men dwelt near to you; but, say now, has any one seen this wonder working?"

"This day shall the people of the kraal see that wonder," said Smithers.

"Lies," Mopa blazed fiercely. "It were better for you, white man, that you keep silence, lest a red hot spear deprive you of speech.

"Heed me, ye people," the Witch Doctor continued. "Have ye been told of the wickedness of these twain toward *me*—the Mouthpiece of the Spirits?"

"Nay, it is not known to us. Tell us, O Mighty One."

"But yesterday it was," cried Mopa, "just before the setting of the sun. I suddenly beheld the form of the 'unmentionable,' my wife's mother, approaching. Lest I come face to face with her, and thus incur the anger of the Spirits, I hid behind a tree as custom ordains. Then these wicked ones, by casting a spirit of evil at me—right here it entered—caused me to commit the great sin; aye, caused me to gaze upon the countenance of her who must not be seen."

"Death only can avenge thee, O Mopa," shouted one of the warriors, and at his words the others appealed to Mphoengs:

"Say the word, O Chief," they pleaded, "and we will bury our spears in the bodies of these jackals."

Mphoengs, an evil smile of satisfaction on his face, watched them for a while, then, turning to Mopa, conversed with the Witch Doctor in low tones.

"It's all my fault," groaned Young, as Smithers quickly explained their predicament. "But if I could get rid of these ——"

He strained at the ropes which bound him.

He broke suddenly into a chuckle.

"I sure did hurt the old boy's dignity. But wasn't it a dandy curve, just the same?"

"A bally fluke," Smithers replied shortly. "What I'm worrying about is how to get out of this mess."

"Do you think they mean business?"

" 'Fraid so. Mphoengs has never been cordial, you know, and now, with Mopa to back him up, there's no telling how far he'll go."

"——! I wish I could speak the lingo. I'd bluff him out of any intention he has of killing us. Why don't you try it?"

"That's just what I'm going to do—but I'm afraid it will be useless.

"Mphoengs!" Smithers raised his voice in an appeal for a hearing.

Mphoengs looked at him with a contemptuous smile—

"Say on, white man."

"That which befell Mopa yesterday was no magic; neither did we seek to compel him to commit the grievous fault. It was an act of folly, without doubt, but not a deed of evil."

"Bah!" Mopa interrupted angrily. "The tree was betwixt me and you, and yet the 'thing' hit me. Was not that magic?"

"It was but a game—a child's game."

"It was magic, I say—evil magic. Even so, am I, Mopa, a child?"

"Hast anything further to say?" asked Mphoengs softly.

"I would warn thee, O Chief, to take care how you act concerning us."

"Dost threaten me?"

"Nay. I only bid thee remember that this day comes the giant bird bearing men on its back. Those men will hold thee to a strict accounting should any evil come nigh unto us."

Mphoengs turned to Mopa. His attitude was one of indecision; he had not forgotten the "monsters" and the burning of his hut.

"What sayest thou, O Mopa?"

"Thou art indeed bewitched, O Fat One," cried the Witch Doctor. "Why else shouldst thou be troubled in thy mind regarding the threats of these liars? Are white men Spirits that they should have the power to fly through the air? Nay. We know them to be but men, performing all the natural

functions of men. They are crafty and possessed of low cunning. Seeing the wealth of this land, they desire to take it unto themselves. It is to that end they work evil.

"Ye failed that other time when ye went against them because the Spirits were not with ye; but now word hath come to me from the Great Ones—and I am not their mouthpiece?—that only the death of these twain can save the kraal from becoming a place of desolation.

"I leave ye at this time to go to my own place; there to commune with the Spirits. If ye fail in this, rest assured that evil will fall upon ye."

A deep silence followed the withdrawal of Mopa from the Council Place, and Smithers' attempts to speak again were frustrated by the warrior guards who stood beside him.

"*Tula!*" they commanded fiercely. "Hold thy tongue, white man, until the Chief bids thee speak."

"I grieve for ye, white men," said Mphoengs suddenly, "and so will endeavor to make thy passage into the land of the Spirits an easy one."

"Then thou art determined on this course of folly?"

"Folly? Nay, it is no folly to appease the Mighty Ones. But, before ye go, I would know more about that game which 'he-whose - hair - is - of - the - color - of - flames' plays."

Smithers turned to Young with a comical expression of dismay.

"What is it?" Young asked.

"He wants to know all about that fool game of yours."

"Well, tell him. Tell him the whole history of the game. It'll take time, and longer still to explain all the fine points. Before we're through the plane may arrive."

"That's a good thought, old chap. But I hate having to translate all that bally rot, and how the deuce I'm going to translate 'skating home' is beyond me."

"Sliding home, you poor nut. First of all, tell him——"

TWO hours later the two white men were escorted to the landing field, and Young bound securely to the stump of a tree.

"Now we shall see," said Mphoengs with a smile, "how this game is played. You, white man, shall take the bat and try to hit the ball when my warriors throw it at the other white man. It will afford us great sport. I pray to the Spirits that thy eye is not over sharp, for it is my purpose that you will stand directly before that other white man, so, should you fail to hit the ball, the ball will hit him."

"That I will not do, Mphoengs."

"No? Then I must seek another way to amuse my people. I have heard it said that the cutting off of a man's fingers, one by one, is not without a certain amount of pain. Should that fail to amuse, there are doubtless other ways."

"What are you talking about?" Young demanded.

Smithers told him briefly of the Chief's delectable plan to afford amusement for the warriors.

"Well? What are you jawing about? Go to it."

"But suppose I miss?"

"Thought you wanted to bet me that you could hit every ball I pitched to you? These niggers aren't likely to throw curves. Nothing but just straight balls. It's a chance. Try to knock the ball out of the lot so that they'll waste a lot of time looking for it. Anything to gain time."

"We are waiting, white men," called Mphoengs.

"What comes after thou art weary of this game, O Chief?"

"A quick and merciful death. That I promise."

Smithers hesitated a moment,

"I am ready," he said finally, and took his stand before Young.

A burly warrior stepped to the worn place which marked the "pitcher's box" and hurled the ball with all his force at Young.

Smithers lashed wildly, but the ball was wide and high.

"You're swinging like a gate," scoffed Young. "Strike one!"

While they were waiting for the ball to be retrieved, Young chatted away as merrily as though he were on the coaching line back home.

"He's got nothing, Smithers," he said. "A fast ball, and no control. Wait him out and pickle the good 'uns."

The next ball Smithers let go by. The next he saw was in a direct line for Young's waist and, as he really had a good eye—a fellow with poor eyesight doesn't lead his county cricket "batting averages"—met it squarely with the bat.

"A three-bagger," shouted Young. "Ataboy! Now we're getting to him."

Another warrior now took the ball and, with an under-arm motion, lobbed the ball up slowly.

Smithers mistimed it and the ball hit Young in the chest—a fact which was hailed with shouts of approval.

"Sorry, old man. I hit at that one too soon."

"Of course you did. Don't try to kill the slow ones. Take a shorter grip on the bat and bunt 'em."

"How do you mean, bunt?"

But before Young could explain, the warrior "pitched" again. This time it was low and Smithers, using the bat as he would a cricket bat, drove the ball straight back at the pitcher and, hitting him on the shins, incapacitated him for further action.

"Is that a bunt?"

"——, no! That's a new one on me."

From now on the warriors were changed frequently, and Smithers greeted them all with the same lack of respect.

"I fancy I'm doing this rather neatly," said Smithers with a chuckle. "This game is child's play."

"I wish I were pitching to you, I'd soon have you singing another tune. But you're doing fine. If you'd only shorten your swing I could sleep peacefully. As it is, I'm afraid of a foul tip."

There was a stir among the warriors as one of the natives who had been working on the landing-field requested Mphoengs that he be allowed to "play the game."

"We're in for it now," groaned Young. "I taught this nigger how to throw a curve. He's a natural born pitcher and has a drop that'll——"

"Oh, they all look alike to me," said Smithers airily.

"Watch 'em close, and for the love of Pete try to hold out a little longer. I think I heard the plane just now."

"So did I. She must be flying high though. Where shall I place this one?""

The ball was coming at a medium pace toward him, shoulder high, and he swung his bat to meet it. It dropped sharply however just before it reached him, and struck Young on the knee.

"Strike," growled Young. "That was a drop, Smithers. Did you notice it?"

Smithers did not answer. He was waiting with compressed lips for the next delivery. When it came it seemed to be going wide of the mark, and he made no effort to reach it. He was greatly amazed, therefore, to see it curve in and strike Young full in the chest.

"Strike two," said Young when he was through cursing. "That was a curve. Not so —— easy after all, is it?"

Smithers picked up the ball and examined it closely.

"How did he do it?"

"Why he— Listen! Isn't that the plane?"

A tiny speck was visible in the deep blue of the sky; the low drone of a powerful engine came to the ears of the two men.

The natives, gathered around the loudly vaunting "pitcher," were as yet unaware of the coming of the plane.

"Throw back the ball," the pitcher cried boastfully. "This time, white man, it shall strike thy head."

Smithers threw the ball with all his might into the air.

Up and up it went, then the natives, following its flight, saw the swiftly swooping airplane.

To their superstitious minds it seemed as though the ball had, by the power of the white man's magic, been turned into this fearsome, roaring bird. As one man they fell to the ground and hid their faces in their hands.

THE airplane had departed. The people of Mphoengs were returning to their kraals, talking excitedly of the wonders they had been permitted to witness.

They were sure now of the "oneness of the white men with the Spirits." No longer would Mphoengs hold the fear of death over them. He and Mopa had been utterly discredited, and for the first time in many years, the prople of the kraals were really care-free and happy. Nor did they forget to honor the white men who had been instrumental in effecting their release.

Young and Smithers were the recipients of numerous gifts, and their huts were crowded with leopard skins, assagais, fruits, tom-toms, and trophies of the chase. Even the Chief and the Witch Doctor had brought presents seeking to win their favor.

"If you want to finish that argument we started the other night, Smithers," said Young rather half-heartedly, "I'm game."

"Not on your life," replied the other. "Let's go out and play ball."

PETER PAN'S PEBBLE

By MARY GAUNT

AS FAR as the eye could see was nothing but plain; nothing broke the monotony save a clump of salt-bush here and there, looking in the rarefied desert air larger than it really was, plain and sky, sky and plain, and overhead the sun pouring down relentlessly and for shelter the two men had a small rock washed there perhaps in some primeval flood, a rock so small as hardly to be noticeable in another place but here a great landmark in the surrounding Australian plain.

"This must be Peter Pan's Pebble, I suppose," said the European, shading his eyes from the glare and looking around him hopelessly. "Lalor's is eighty miles to the north."

"It would be all the same to me," said his companion in a curiously soft and refined voice, "if it were eight hundred."

Rutley turned on him almost savagely.

"Eighty miles is a mere nothing, Lee Moon."

"A mere nothing, is it? I ought to hold out. The Mongolian is supposed to have endurance, but the last few weeks have been too much for me. I think I'll stay here. You push on to Lalor's. You can send back for me and if the crows haven't found me out——"

Rutley looked at his water-bag. The top was already dry and hard. There was still water at the bottom. He held it up without a word and the other man produced his.

"Empty," he said. "Oh my Irish and improvident mother! Now a man of my father's race—but there, what's the good of moralizing on the ineptitude of the mongrel. I believe it is generally allowed that the Eurasian has the faults of both parents, and I——"

"One thing I'll swear you've got and always did have and I suppose always will," said Rutley almost angrily; "the deliberation of the Oriental. Who but a blooming man from the East would sit there moralizing with eighty miles of desert to cross and about half a pint of water between us."

"You have the half-pint of water," said Lee Moon with a whimsical little smile that perhaps came from his Irish mother. "I have the shadow of Peter Pan's Pebble, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Go on, old man. You always were impatient at school, I remember."

"And my impatience and your deliberation have brought us to exactly the same spot," said Rutley. "Can't you go on, Terence?"

"Adam," said the other quietly, "drop that silly name. I am Lee Moon, son of my father, son of the oldest race on earth. I am going to die and I am a Chinese."

He sat on the ground propped up against the rock. He had taken off his soft billy-cock hat and his straight black hair lay flat on his forehead. His narrow eyes gazed out over the plain quivering in the heat haze.

The big Australian standing beside him was a great contrast. They were both lean, brown men but Rutley's eyes were blue and full, rather deep-set and with heavily fringed dark lashes, the eyes of a man who dwelt in a glaring light; his face in spite of its leanness had the rounded contour of the Anglo-Saxon and though the lips that showed under the mustache were kindly, even the week's growth of beard could not hide the strength and firmness of his jaw.

He looked down at the man at his feet with a little wonder. At the point of death, for if he stayed the chances were against him, to insist on his nationality—the nationality of the despised Chinaman! At school his liking for Terence Lee Moon had withstood the cruel contempt of the average Australian schoolboy for the Oriental and here in western Australia on the gold-fields it had even withstood the fiercer contempt of the Australian digger. He was pals with a Chinaman, but hitherto they had ignored the fact. Now it was being gloried in.

"Chinese or Irish, you are not going to die if I can help it," he said roughly. "Look here, Lee Moon, there must be water somewhere between here and Lalor's; even if there isn't I can do it and we'll be back to help you in next to no time. It isn't as if we were lost. Peter Pan's Pebble is a perfectly well-known landmark. The sooner I start the sooner I'll be back. I'm going now."

He dropped his water-bag and turned as if he would have started on his journey there and then.

The other caught hold of him by the trousers.

"Stop a moment. A little of the deliberation of the Oriental comes in here. You may pull through but I doubt very much whether I can stick it till you come back. I'm so tired I'd rather die than attempt the walk. Oh, I mean it. Spare an old chum three or four minutes even if he is a Chinaman."

"You're not going to die."

"That rests on the knees of the gods. If my salvation depends on my own exertions I certainly am. But what matter? Your people and mine look at life differently. If I die I die. It's neither here nor there. One mongrel less in the world, and I do not approve of mongrels. My father, honest man, counted me all Chinese. The men of our race do not consider the women they use, a son is all they want, and a son he got. But the woman counts for all that. I am going to die because of my Irish mother, but because of the Chinaman in me I do not want to waste. Look here, Adam."

He unfastened a little purse in his leather belt and held out his open hand to Rutley. On it lay a stone, a deep red stone and Adam bending over saw the sunlight caught in the depths of a great ruby.

"Why it's worth thousands," he cried in astonishment.

"Man, it would not buy you a cup of water."

"How did you come by it?"

"Toolamunga. There are buckets of them there if you know where to look, but it wouldn't do to flood the market, so I said nothing. I thought we'd wait till we had a chance to visit Sydney or Melbourne and get up a syndicate."

The other made an impatient movement and he stopped him.

"Oh no, it's quite safe. They'll wait there till you go for them. Possibly this is extra large, but there are plenty. Talk about the ruby mines of Burmah! Here take it, take it."

"But Terence——"

"Now go, my friend. Whether I live or die you shall have the secret. Now go, go."

Adam hesitated. Wealth, unbounded wealth in prospect, in his hand and around them the desolate plain. He looked at the quivering heat haze, looked at the impassive face of his friend, at the narrow eyelids closing over the narrow eyes and wondered that he had never noticed the sadness in it before. Now he came to think of it the sadness had always been there.

"Lee Moon," he said suddenly, "I'm going because I don't know what else to do, but hold on, old man. I'll be back as soon as ever I can." He shook the other's hand, snatched up the empty water-bag and turned away.

The man on the ground half rose as if he would stop him, then dropped back again.

"The ruby has bought me just one cup of water," said he.

Rutley stopped dead and looked over his shoulder.

"No," he said, "no, you should have had the water."

"My friend, I accept the sacrifice," said the Chinaman and dropping back wearily into the shadow of the rock he watched the other man grow slowly smaller on the great plain.

RUTH HAYES was considering her fireplace. Lighting the fire with the thermometer at 90° in the shade and never a hint of moisture in the air was, of course, easy enough, but Biscuit Joe had promised her a more convenient fireplace than the three lumps of clay she had used for some time. There was always some one on hand to help the only woman on Lalor's. She was wont to laugh with her brother at the way her fortune was coming true.

She had wanted to travel and a fortune-teller had once predicted she would travel over sea and desert. It had sounded just what she wanted and had come true to the very letter. From Sydney to Perth she had gone by sea half round the continent in an uncomfortable little coasting steamer and from Perth she had come across the interminable plain to Lalor's—the place that its residents declared God had forgotten.

"My fortune is like the freakish gifts of a goblin," she used to laugh. "She said I should live in the greatest palace in the city and listen to the most lovely music."

"You're ungrateful," said Reuben, "You've the best gramophone on the field and if this isn't a palace I don't know what is. Who else has bags on the roof to keep the place cool?"

"Two rooms—of Hessian—and a lean-to."

It was a fact that Lalor's, fearing neither cold nor wet was built on the simplest of plans. Any man wanting a house put four poles in the earth as nearly square as he could, mounted a corrugated iron roof upon them and for walls wound Hessian round them, and Hessian, as no Australian needs be told, is the very flimsiest sort of sacking.

"And my husband," she went on mockingly; "there is always a husband in a girl's fortune, is to come out of the jaws of death bearing great wealth in his hands. I am really curious to see that translated into the terms of two rooms and a lean-to."

"You're not properly thankful for your good luck," said Reuben preparing to take his departure for the store he and Bon Harcourt were working between them as more profitable than digging. "Most of the men grovel in a way that makes me ashamed of you and look at poor old Biscuit slaving when no one else is handy."

Biscuit Joe approached with a rusted kerosene tin in his hands.

"Now, missie, have you such a thing as a little kerosene? For I haven't a drain, though upon my word I'd like to oblige you. But if you have we'll have a chimney up in a jiff, a chimney fit for a queen."

She laughed and pointed to the can standing just inside the door, or rather the place where the door should have been in the greatest palace in the city.

He poured a little into the old tin, dropped in a lighted match and ran to her side. There was a pause, a puff of smoke, a startling little explosion and the tin which had been like a square bucket lay in a flat jagged square on the ground.

Ruth jumped and Joe laughed.

"Lord bless me! You don't mean to tell me you never flattened out a tin before. Now you see we can fix that fireplace of yours."

While he was fixing it Ruth stood outside her house which was on the outskirts and looked away over the gray plain with the hard blue sky arched overhead. Far, far away was that sky. Looking up, she looked into translucent depths and even though the heat rose up from the ground and smote her the beauty of those far depths absorbed her. She brought down her eyes to the old man in patched trousers so thoughtfully fixing her fireplace. She glanced inside the little house.

The table fixed on four small stakes embedded in the ground—for no man at Lalor's had as yet been such a Sybarite as to desire a floor—still held the remains of breakfast and presently she would clear it away. Her fortune had promised her the best servants in the world, and she had come to the conclusion that her own hands answered that description. Lalor's was loud in praise of her housekeeping. She declared Lalor's kept Reuben in a properly chastened state. It made sure he should appreciate his

sister. Well, after all, she was happy. If it was hot the air was like champagne and she had a great sense of well-being. Need a woman, even a good-looking young woman, ask more?

Her eyes wandered again to the horizon. Nothing, nothing larger than a clump of salt-bush in the whole wide semi-circle, not a beast, not a bird, not a——

"Why—why—what *is* that?"

She had looked so often for the last month and had expected to see nothing and now there was something, a curious little black speck that might have been a dog. Every now and then it rose into an upright position and then it fell forward again on all fours and lay still in the empty sky apparently supported by nothing.

Ruth's astonishment was expressed in her stammering question and the man at her feet rose up and shaded his eyes. Then he too saw it and in a moment the fireplace was forgotten. He grasped the situation and the need for haste.

"Lost man," said he. "Jeehosphat! He's reached the limit! Now I wonder if Bon's stinker's in going order."

And without another word he had abandoned building operations and was racing to the store to suggest to some one stronger than he the desirability of setting out on the storekeeper's motorcycle.

But it was not a going concern just at that moment and at Lalor's there was no feed for horses. But in three minutes all who were not below earth were streaming out over the plain to the southwest and Ruth at the tail end was calling to her brother:

"Bring him here, Reuben, bring him here and let us do what we can for him. I'll have hot water."

But he was miles away. She hardly realized at first the distance one can see in the clear dry air of Australia's plains. The water was hot and cooling and she could see still the men of Lalor's tailing out over the plain, painfully climbing, so it seemed to her, to the rim of the horizon. Little black spots they were now and some of them were returning.

At another arc of the wide circle more to the north the camel carts from Kirkham's came into sight, the camels stepping solemnly in empty space and drawing the laden carts after them also in empty space. Then they disappeared and she gasped and Biscuit Joe, wiping his damp forehead and leaning on a broken-down bundle of rusty iron he called a push bike, explained that the plain rose and fell in ridges hardly perceptible. Presently she would see the carts on the sound earth and one of the boys would get one of them to bring in the lost beggar. He'd given up. It was too far for him, and he rubbed his shirt sleeve again across his forehead.

"Bless you, missie, he's a long ways off—longer'n you realize."

She went in then and sat down in the shade, sheltered from the glare; but two camel carts came in and went to the store, and the sun had reached his meridian and was pouring down his fiercest unshaded rays on the little mining township when she heard talking and shouting. Beside a creaking camel cart walked her brother and his partner and the Afghan driver. There was some one in the cart, some one inert and helpless.

"Will he get well?" she asked excitedly. "Are you bringing him here?"

But Reuben only nodded toward the store.

"We're taking him to Bon's."

"But if I could help——"

"My dear young lady," said Bon Harcourt somewhat superciliously, "he's a blooming Chinaman."

"Besides," said Reuben shortly, "he's dead."

RUTLEY walked steadily on. His swag was strapped across his shoulder, his billy slung to the strap and his water-bag, Lee Moon's empty water-bag, he carried in his hand. Small chance had he, he knew, of filling it before he reached Lalor's, but if there were a thousandth part of a chance that water-bag might make all the difference to him. And eighty miles to go. Tucker—yes he had a little flour and a little salt meat—salt meat, he laughed grimly, and debated whether it would not be well to lighten the load of all but his blankets. Even of those he would not have much need; and that eighty miles would take every ounce of strength he possessed. He looked up into the far away translucent sky, the sky that went away into infinity and he did not underrate that task he had undertaken—nay that had been thrust upon him. Eighty miles to go—eighty miles to go, his feet marched to it, eighty miles without a drop

of water in the burning heat, eighty miles to be tramped, or crawled, or got over somehow with the knowledge that if he did not accomplish it, not only he must die but the man waiting there under the shadow of the rock.

Adam wondered that he had been content to stay there—to stay there dying. There had been an infinite weariness in his face and he seemed to realize now as he had not done before that every movement had been a terrible effort to his mate for days. He was glad to rest even if the resting might mean death.

Certainly luck had been against them of late. At the bottom of his heart, he, Adam, had had a faint uneasy idea it was because he had had a Chinaman for a mate. That made the others among whom he found himself look askance at him but it did not explain their extreme ill luck at the opal mines at Toolamunga.

But had they been unlucky?

He took out the ruby and stood for a moment looking at it and the brilliant shadeless sunlight was caught in every facet and reflected blood-red on the palm of his hand. A beautiful thing, a stone such as Eastern princes wore in their turbans, a stone to give wealth, or at least sufficient to both his Chinese mate and himself. And Lee Moon declared there were more where that came from; thousands, enough to flood the market and make this beautiful thing of little value.

And then he remembered stones like this were not found in their natural state. How had—oh of course, how often he had caught Lee Moon working at something, something he had put in his pocket as of no account the moment his mate came upon the scene. He had wondered a little but not much. He had been too troubled at their persistent ill luck, had been irked at his mate's Oriental apathy—and after all he had not been apathetic.

But he had been too deliberate as usual. Would a Chinaman never learn the value of time? Had he but disclosed his find, say to the resident magistrate there had been no need to leave Toolamunga on foot, no need to fling themselves into the wide desert of the plains at mid-Summer, no need to tramp to Kirkham's. They might have raised fairly comfortable or at least safe transport, they might——

But what was the good of thinking of what might have been? He was here with a king's ransom wrapped in a rag and stowed inside his belt. After all one didn't go much on kings these times. Here was Karl of Austria just come to grief for a second time and he, Adam Rutley——

But he would not give it voice. Dying of thirst? Not the least danger of such a thing. He would reach Lalor's. He would save the man he had left sheltering under Peter Pan's Pebble.

It was no good rushing it. His natural desire was to race on, away from this shadeless desert, this intolerable heat and glare but he checked his steps. Eighty miles to go and a man who did thirty miles a day with plenty of food and water did well. A man who was driven could do no more. Two days and a half without food and water, two days, two days——

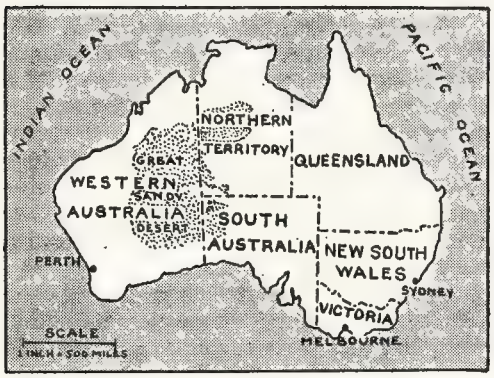
He looked ahead. Nothing but the sky and the land rising up to it; land covered with scant herbage, salt-bush, just a tuft here and there, dried and withered with the continued drought. He would not count, he would not think, or if he must think, he would think only of the good times that were coming when they developed the ruby mines of Toolamunga.

And so he tramped on and on and on and the shadow that had been behind him came slowly round across the dusty earth and the withered bunches of salt-bush till it stretched away toward the east. That shadow gave him an intolerable sensation of loneliness. It emphasized as nothing else could the emptiness of the land. He looked under the rim of his soft billycock hat through his shading fingers at the blazing orb of light that hung just above the horizon in a sky white with heat but cloudless and the long beams of golden light came stretching right up to his eyes. Between him and that sun was nothing—nothing but the illimitable plain, gray beside him and blue in the far distance.

But the sun was sinking. Already the power of his rays was abated. The night was coming. How far had he gone? Out of sight of Peter Pan's Pebble? He looked behind him and he could have cried aloud with the bitterness of the disappointment. It was there, there still. And then he sighted a sigh of intense relief. A strip of blue sky, blue with the softened greenish blueness of the deepening evening was around all the rock. It hung in mid-air.

He knew the mirage. It was a kindly thing this evening showing him the place he had left, reminding him he was not alone in a dead world. Here was company for his loneliness. The man who had been a good mate was there and for his sake if not for his own he must reach Lalor's.

And then he felt he was weary, too weary to go on. He was thirsty—but no, he



dared not think of that and he sat down on the ground and took off his boots and socks and gently chafed his legs.

He felt as if red-hot wires were stretching from his thighs through his calves down to his ankles. But after all that was nothing; most men who tramped suffered so when they had to put on a little extra pressure.

He would take every precaution. He would order his way as a man who had absolutely nothing at stake might order it. And as he sat sidewise to the sinking sun his shadow stretched out grotesquely on the earth beside him, and he thought fancifully what a pity it was that the only bit of shadow in all the wide universe should be wasted. What would he not have given for a patch of shade like that? And there it was close beside him and he could not make use of it.

The sun slipped below the horizon and his golden rays stretched outward and upward like an outspread fan, gold against a blood-red sky, the background faded to purple. And then the darkness came with a pleasant coolness and a faint baby breeze that caressed his cheek and the glorious stars of the southern hemisphere were above him looking down at him protectingly.

He opened his flour bag—useless—useless. He scooped a hole for his hip-joint in the loose earth and he slept uneasily because his old wound was beginning to ache and his throat was dry, and do what he would he could not but think of pleasant water-holes fringed with green growing fern and sedge; of the water lapping round his feet as he stepped in, of the soft gurgle as it washed against the stones.

But when he stooped to drink, just as it was at his lips he wakened, only to doze again and see it leaping down high cliffs in great waterfalls that swept all before them, oceans of water, laving his feet but never never rising to his lips. The water tormented him. He desired it so intensely and he had but to close his eyes and he could feel it against his bare feet, but the moment he tried to drink he was feverishly awake with the stars that were like brilliant cut diamonds looking down at him.

It was the cool air against his bare feet that made him dream. And he had hoped it would refresh him. He unwrapped his swag and covered them with his blankets and then it was as if a burning, fiery fever had seized upon him. The dryness in his throat grew worse, and he uncovered them again and dozed uneasily, and when at last by the light of a match his wrist-watch told him it was midnight and he had been struggling with sleep for four hours he rose up, and though his feet were as dead weight and the sinews in his legs were strained worse than ever, he looked up at the stars, found the Southern Cross, turned his back upon it, chose a star and went straight ahead.

A long night, a weary long night. He feared the day and yet he longed for it, for when the day came he would be half-way to Lalor's. He was walking, actually walking at the rate of three miles an hour, of that he was sure and three miles an hour for thirteen hours would be close on forty miles.

But no, of course he had not gone forty miles because he had rested at intervals. He had had to rest, but at least he had broken the back of the journey. The thought heartened him. It took the bitterness and the fear out of the dreadful sameness. There was nothing to mark how he was getting on but because he kept that star ahead, making due allowance as a wise bushman for its movement in the heavens, he knew in spite of thirst, in spite of intense weariness, a weariness that every now and

then made him pause and lie flat on his back with his arms stretched out and his eyes gazing up into the far away sky, he knew he was getting on, widening the distance between himself and the lonely rock.

He could not lie long though; each time he rose it was more difficult. It was agony at first to put his feet to the ground, but he always got up and went on because he must make the most of the cool night. When the day came and he had been without water for four and twenty hours he dreaded to think what his sufferings would be. Only he comforted himself, he would be nearer his goal.

He was far, far better off than Lee Moon, ill and weary and eighty miles from the nearest water. That one thought heartened him through everything. Each painful step was taking him nearer safety for them both. And he wondered now that he had ever worried over his ill luck; had ever complained because at nine and twenty with all his education and all his work he had found himself in no better situation than the other diggers round him. He had always had plenty of water to drink; he had been able to sleep peacefully at night. Why had he not been content?

He was lying resting when a lightening in the sky made him turn his face to the East. Yes, the day was coming, coming swiftly, as it always seems to do in those latitudes and he struggled to his feet again determined to go as far as he could before the great heat was upon him.

After all what had he to fear? Not death? He had faced death at Gallipoli scrambling up the heights at Cape Hellas. His comrades had fallen around him like flies but he had gone on, on and on till a piece of shrapnel in the hip had brought him to the ground and finished his military career. They had said he would die, and then that he would go on crutches all his days, and then that he would be lame all his life and yet after all he had got off with a slight limp.

How he had walked the last few weeks! How he had walked this last day and night! If he had known in those miserable days when he feared to lose his leg that he would ever again walk like this how thankful he would have been. It heartened him to think of those tribulations safely passed and now even after all this walking, this privation, his hip only hurt him a little, so little it was hardly worth mentioning.

Two days' thirst with safety at the end—why it was nothing to a man who had lain out for thirty-six hours on a battlefield; who had endured the excruciating agony of being carried in haste to an ambulance over the rough and stony ground; who had spent days and nights of wearying pain, dreading—dreading mutilation and disfigurement. This test of endurance was just nothing.

Peter Pan's Pebble was gone now. He was alone on the great plain and nothing was in sight to break the monotony. The next thing would be the poppet heads of Lalor's. They said there were three claims with poppet heads now, so had Lalor's grown. He looked ahead, but not yet—not yet, it was too soon. Tonight? No, but certainly tomorrow. And yesterday they had been two days off.

The hours that stretched behind him seemed long. Almost it seemed in another world he had parted from Lee Moon and the hours ahead—he dared not measure them by the hours that lay behind. Sky and withered salt-bush and blazing heat, the air quivering with it and not a thing moving but his shadow crawling along beside him humped and bent and moving back and back as if it were ashamed of being so useless.

Was he a bent limping old man like that? He laughed a little, a choked sort of laugh for his lips were dry, there was no saliva in his mouth, his tongue felt as if it had swollen and then dried too large for his mouth and he had to walk bent because it eased a little the pain in his hip. An old pain, but a fraction of the agony he used to suffer there in the first months after his wound, but it eased him to walk so and there was no one to see, no one but the crows.

Why, of course, there were crows. He had noticed them before. Handsome, big blue-black fellows. After all then there was water somewhere on this plain for at Peter Pan's Pebble there had been no crows. Lee Moon had spoken of them finding him out, but he was not in straits yet. He did not need to fear the crows.

He told himself that again and again, for the crows followed him and when he sat down to rest they formed a ring round him, twenty, no he counted thirty. That ring of crows made him uneasy. Not that

he feared them but he hated to think of them at his back where he could not see them. He shooed them off and laid down on his face to guard his eyes from the fierce sunshine and he would have dozed a little with his forehead on his arms, but he looked again first and the crows were making their ring narrower.

They pushed one another aside like children at a show. He drove them away and the whirr of their wings and their solemn caws broke the deadly stillness with a certain sinister sound. But they did not go far. They would not leave him.

No, he could not rest. He got up again though his wounded leg was all one cruel ache now and he stumbled on and the crows came too and he heard his own cracked voice shouting at them and he flung things at them, his billy, his water-bag and he was stooping to take off his boots when he caught hold of himself and realized what this meant. This was the madness that overtook driven men.

It behooved him to keep a tight rein on himself and he laced his boot again and picked up his water-bag. And he felt bitterly that he had to go perhaps twenty feet out of his way to do it. He was counting the way by inches now. He had perhaps forty miles to go to Lalor's and he grudged this twenty feet to his overtaxed strength.

He must not think of the crows. He must think of nothing but keeping his shadow in the right direction. It was silly that the shadow had to keep always behind him ashamed of his own uselessness.

And so he went on, now resting now crawling on again, bent nearly double to ease the pain in his hip and the crows kept him company, the crows that he would not think about, or thought about only to remember that because they were there this place was not absolutely desolate; there must be water somewhere. And he went on and on and on resolutely declining to look at his watch, till after it seemed he had been walking aeons of years over this interminable plain he saw there just ahead the tiniest break in the horizon as if the land dipped a little and rose again on either side so that there was the faintest suggestion of cliffs, a suggestion that in another land would have passed unnoticed. He looked at his watch then. In another world he had left his mate at Peter Pan's Pebble and behold he had only been walking for six and twenty hours. He would rest again a little longer when he reached the break in the great plain.

BUT it took him longer than he had thought and it was at least two hours before he found himself descending toward a little cliff and then—and then—was he going mad—was he dreaming, as he dreamed when he tried to sleep? But no, dreams were not such poor things. He knew the meaning of that dampish earth at the foot of the tiny cliff, the earth that was not sand and that looked as if once, once in past ages it had been wet, and there was a little grass growing too; grass that still held a semblance of green about it. A soak, thank God, a soak, and no one had ever spoken of a soak between Peter Pan's Pebble and Lalor's.

He flung himself down on his face then and scraped where the earth looked most moist with his knife and with his bare hands, for he had nothing else with which to work and he worked easily, gladly, though so short a time before every bone in his body had cried out against the exertion, for with every handful the earth grew moister. It was cool and wet to his fingers and he put it to his cracked and swollen lips and sucked in delicious nectar.

And he worked on feverishly till the blessed water was oozing up at the bottom of the hole he had made and he put his face down then and drank, drank slowly luxuriously with the knowledge that precious as it was there was plenty—plenty. He felt God was very good. This world was a glorious world and the sun above was life-giving. So the crows had been right. There was water.

The crows were gone. He was alone again with his shadow. He laughed at the thought now for the sun was in the heavens there and the blessed water was at his side. It was the best of worlds and he and Lee Moon would go back and develop the ruby mines at Toolamunga. An overpowering weariness seized upon him. He must be quick and save Lee Moon; he must get on, and even as he thought he would go on, sleep fell on his eyelids and in the scrap of shade given by the tiny cliff he sank into oblivion. A sleep that was as blessed and refreshing as the water had been.

But his inner consciousness kept watch

over him. It reminded him that though he might linger Lee Moon had not this water, Lee Moon was suffering the agonies he had just come through; and when he had slept enough to be refreshed he roused wide awake with the strong feeling upon him that he was neglecting his duty, wasting precious time.

If the man who had been his chum since their school-days, incongruous as it had always seemed to those around him, was to be saved he must start off at once. There was not a moment to be lost. He got out his flour-bag now. There wasn't a chip of wood but there was a little withered grass. He might have made a fire and baked a damper in the ashes. But he was too impatient. He could not spare the time. He moistened a little flour with water and ate it hastily—after all it wasn't bad and he must fill his water-bag. And he'd thrown away his billy. What a fool! What a fool! A bag was so difficult to fill and it must be filled to the top. Well never mind. He had not been accustomed to live easily. Not forty miles to Lalor's now and a full water-bag. He took off his boot and used it as a cup.

He stood up and stretched out his arms. He felt a free man with the glories of the earth at his feet. He looked around as he could not have looked when he had arrived worn and done. It was extraordinary that no one had ever mentioned this soak between Peter Pan's Pebble and Lalor's; because it made all the difference. If they had known of this soak, why he and Lee Moon could have come on together. It would have been just a difficult walk, that was all.

And then his eye fell on a piece of fluttering rag. It was tied, yes actually tied to a small jutting rock in the little outcrop. Some one had tied it there to show the soak. No the soak was much more in evidence than the small piece of rag. He felt he had not much time to waste but he stepped up and looked at that fluttering rag that told him another man had been here after all not so very long ago. Some one who had scraped the rock with a knife.

He took out his own knife and scraped. And then he stood back with a shout that echoed weirdly over the empty plain. Here was what he had been seeking, seeking vainly ever since he had come to the fields; here was a show of gold in plenty. Here was what might make even the ruby he held in his belt but a small thing. But—he looked at the fluttering rag—some one else's.

And he was wasting the precious time. Lee Moon was suffering as he had suffered and what was gold beside the water? Some one else's gold. No one who knew enough to mark it would lightly leave a claim like this and he went back.

The soak was already filling with earth again, but he cleared it out and took another deep draught. His bag was full and he faced north once more. His first care must be his mate. After that the future was as he had said, on the knees of the gods.

But he had not gone twenty yards when he came to a full stop. What was this bundle of tatters? Another find? In spite of the blazing sunlight that poured down on the shimmering plain he went cold all over. Yet he had seen dead men aplenty. On the beach at Anzac, at Cape Hellas they had been as the leaves in Autumn.

Australia had given her best and yet he was standing shuddering because a man lay here, the owner of the claim, the man who had tied that scrap of his kerchief to the piece of rock to mark the place. The gold he had found had not saved him. No, nor the water that was more precious still.

He lay dead under the blazing sky and the crows had torn his poor clothes to shreds and picked his bones bare, dead with water and gold—the two things that seemed to Adam Rutley the most worth while—well within his grasp. The kingdoms of the earth had been his and he lay there a forlorn relic of humanity.

He had been dead a long time, this unknown man. That was evident. No one had been here for months past; longer than that, a year possibly. The loneliness that had gone came rushing back over Adam. He was alone in the world with all that was left of this man and this was happening within forty miles of Lalor's. He stooped over the body and then drew away quickly. It seemed some mocking spirit looked up at him out of the empty eye-sockets and jeered at him.

"Water and gold, gold and water and look at me!"

BUT this was no time for investigation.

He had lain there for months and so he must lie till he and Lee Moon could come back and——

And then again Adam Rutley stopped. He had found this water and Lee Moon was dying for want of water. True he had left him all he had and could a man do more? He could not go back with this water. What was one bag of water between two men? Forty miles back. He shuddered at the thought of that awful forty miles, forty miles again to the soak and— He went over it again. Could he possibly get to Peter Pan's Pebble without touching that water—without drinking the lot? He had reckoned it would hardly last him to Lalor's. If Lee Moon had only made an effort—if he had been with him they could have gone on together. For the moment he was wildly angry with his whilom mate.

Surely he had always been a drag upon him. He had kept him apart from the other men. They had always failed when they had been together. His brother had been right when he said, "if you are such a fool as to stick to that blooming Chinaman you're bound to come to grief." Yes, Tom was right. But Tom had not practised what he had preached. He too had stuck to Lee Moon, had laughed at his own folly and had been the best friend Lee Moon ever had.

But Tom was dead at Anzac. Adam saw his quiet face now looking up to the sky with just a little happy smile on his lips as if something had pleased him. He didn't know whether it was madness or not but because of that little smile on his dead brother's face he would go back.

He would take the water and they would fight it out somehow together. With that water-bag full they would crawl to the soak and if Terence could not manage to get any farther he could leave him there with a quiet mind and go on for help. It would be an awful journey, like a journey in a nightmare, but it would be done.

He went back to the water and laved his face and his hands and soaked his shirt and drank deep and then resolutely abandoning everything but the precious water-bag he set his face to the south again and began that nightmare journey.

It was late in the afternoon when he started and the sun was sinking toward the west and his mocking shadow faced the other way now and laughed at him. It was more bent than ever and he seemed to be limping and hopping because it was almost agony—not quite—to put his foot to the ground. In normal times he would not have thought himself fit to cross a road and he proposed to do one hundred and twenty miles—no it was only forty miles to Peter Pan's Pebble. He would only think of that.

And at Peter Pan's Pebble he could drink, could share the water with Lee Moon. Any man could walk forty miles without water when he knew for certain—as he knew—that there was water aplenty at the end of his tramp. Besides he could do most of it by night and he resolutely put out of his mind the remembrance that he had started out with the knowledge that there was certainly water and all else he needed within eighty miles of him.

The sun sank in a glory of purple and gold and there in the west just above the horizon hung the silver thread of the new moon like a thumb-nail. He laughed a little because he was seeing it for the first time over his right shoulder in the open and it surely meant good luck.

But the hours of darkness were terrible. He was not so very thirsty now, at least he ought not to have been, but the terrible pain in his leg made him feverish and he craved water, Lee Moon's water, the water there at his side that he must not touch. He could not lie still and rest because the temptation was too great, he felt he must keep moving, must feel that every painful step was at least bringing him nearer his goal.

He crushed down the insistent questioning voice that kept asking: "And when the water is gone, what then? How can you walk back when it takes such a tremendous effort to get there? Lee Moon? And you know Terence always had a weak heart and likely as not he will collapse before he reaches the soak even if you can persuade him to leave the Pebble."

Then he raged against Lee Moon, the man who had brought him to this. He meant well but all that he did was ineffectual. He had saved the ruby till it was too late. He had pushed on when he ought to have stopped at Rafferty's and he had declared his inability to go on at Peter Pan's Pebble just when they were out of reach of all help.

Well, not all help. He, Adam, was here and for the sake of their long friendship, the friendship that had withstood even the

strain of a racial difference, he would bring him the help though he were crawling over hot knives to do it, though every bone in his body ached and cried out for rest, though it took all his strength to combat that feverish craving for water.

There was a mist, a heat mist in the sky when the day broke and the sun rose up a round, red-gold ball that he could look at with his naked eye; hot yes, but not overpowering. If it would only stay like that. His shadow stretched away to the west—right over the plain it stretched lengthened out, a humped, bent thing and the crows were with him again.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!"

There was something sinister in the sound and when he thought of the bundle of fluttering rags that he had left behind at the soak he shivered in spite of the heat. That is what it all came to, tatters and a skeleton alongside the richest reef in Western Australia. He ought to see the Pebble surely now. Before when it had disheartened him he had seen it; but now when it would have cheered him there was nothing but his shadow and the miles of scant withered salt-bush and the red disk of the sun momentarily climbing higher in the heavens. And the water—the dear-bought water was shrinking. Already the top of the bag was dry. It was wasting and every fiber in his body was craving for it.

But what was the good of this toilsome journey, this terrible awful struggle if he arrived at the Pebble without water? It would spell death to both of them.

On and on. The crows came too, and when he rested as perforce he was obliged to rest they sat round him in a row and sometimes they changed places solemnly so that each might have a good view in turn and when he rose up they rose too. As the day drew on his sight grew blurred. He passed his hand over his eyes again and again but he could not see. Sky and plain were all one, even the outline of the crows. He could hear their sinister caw quite close, but he could not see them save as smudges that moved.

All the more need for haste then. He must reach Lee Moon before his senses gave way. He must take him this water and so justify himself for turning back. It could be done, yes it could be done, even if he could not see. That was one advantage in a blazing cloudless day. He must remember that the sun was on his left in the morning and his shadow would be before him at midday and the hot sun on his back. It tired him to work it out more than that, but that he could do. It should be easily remembered. The difficulty was he could not see the hands of his watch.

But perhaps after a little rest——

He had been wrong, now he felt it. He should have pushed on. Eighty miles would have been nothing to the men at Lalor's. He had blamed Lee Moon, but was it not his own folly that was condemning them both to death? His only justification was the water. Though he were dying of thirst he would not touch a drop. He dared not. Not one drop. And the longing was so great. The sun was drying it up, wasting it wickedly. But if he drank it would dry more quickly still.

He had bottomed it then. He could hardly crawl. The pain all down his thigh was fierce and the craving for a drink insupportable—unendurable. He was failing. Reach Lalor's? He could never reach Peter Pan's Pebble. At his door would lie his mate's death. Even the water bag was an unbearable weight. He had hallucinations. Tom dead at Gallipoli was coming toward him urging him to bear up and to save the water. It was Lee Moon's. He put it down and moved a little way off. He must put himself out of the way of temptation. It's Lee Moon's, Lee Moon's. And his mother who lived in a little cottage at Brighton with the green tea-tree growing up behind it and plenty of water running away in waste from the taps kept saying she had always hoped he would be honest; she asked no more, just that her boy should be honest. His kind, gentle mother. But she did not understand. Why, the water she wasted every washing-day— He laughed. He realized his mind was wandering and he stood up and stretched his arms to the brazen sky.

"O God! O God!"

But Tom was risen from his grave. He was beside him. He put his hand on his shoulder. Strangely strong and firm it felt that grasp that gave him a little shake.

"Hallo mate!"

"What? What?"

This was no fancy. He wakened suddenly to a new world. He passed his hands across his eyes. The crows had

moved farther off. But was he dreaming? There stood a cart drawn by a couple of camels yoked tandem fashion and a man with cloth over his head, an Afghan he knew, stood at the foremost camel's head and at his side was a man in the ordinary garb of the bush, his billycock hat pushed back from his forehead and a question in his kindly blue eyes.

"What the dickens is the matter, mate? You've plenty of water."

So he too recognized the value of water.

"I'm taking it to Lee Moon at Peter Pan's Pebble. I daren't——"

The other snatched up the bag and held it to Adam's lips. Men understand in the desert.

"Drink, man, drink. But not too much; it's dangerous."

And he drank carefully, wetting his lips, letting the water trickle down his throat and as he drank all the weariness and trouble and desolation fell away from him. Safe! Safe! And the unaccustomed tears sprang to his eyes and lay on his cheek and he dropped down on the ground and covered his face with his hands.

THE man standing over him waited a moment. Then he spoke.

"We didn't think to find you so soon."

"Were you looking for me?" he asked astonished.

The other nodded and drew a crumpled piece of paper from his belt. Smoothing it out he gave it to Rutley.

It was a letter written in Lee Moon's small neat hand—he was deliberate even in the face of death.

"Adam Rutley"—Adam remembered then how careful Lee Moon had always been of late never to claim him as a friend. He, Adam knew instinctively, did not wish to prejudice him by declaring he had a Chinaman for a mate though he held his own head high and was proud of his father.

Adam Rutley has started out for Lalor's due north. I feel sure he should have gone more to the west. I regret I have drunk all the water, but I am doing the best I can. I am afraid I can't reach Lalor's but perhaps I can get so far that some one will find me. Then he must search due north from Peter Pan's Pebble. He must be quick for Rutley has no water. When found give him this letter.

It was signed "Lee Moon." He had dropped the Terence as he said he would.

Adam opened the other letter. In it was a neatly drawn plan drawn in happier times at leisure.

"Here is the secret," was written in a corner. "I thank whatever gods there be for a good friend."

"Lee Moon?" asked Adam eagerly.

The other nodded gravely. "Gone west. Dead when we found him, but he pretty nearly struck Lalor's, luckily for you. I rather guessed you'd be a goner too. We never reckoned on finding you so soon."

Then Adam tried to explain how he had come back with water for Lee Moon, how he had found gold and water and——

The other cut him short.

"It's well you had that hunch to come back for your mate. Man alive. He was quite right. You ain't on the track to Lalor's. You were bound out into the desert. The country gets worse and worse as it goes on. Lalor's is more to the west. The camels are tired. I guess we'd never have collected you in time. We were just going to rest for a bit when we sighted something unusual over here and the crows were crying, "Hail to the feast!" so we just cavorted over to see what was the matter, and here you are."

"But the soak——"

"I never heard tell of a soak. Sure you didn't dream it. No, there's the bag. How far back? Oh gee! I guess you ain't in a condition to count miles. No, an' I guess you don't know much about the time either. You 'pear to have been movin' in a circle. It's the beginning of the end. A deader? If he's very dead we'll leave him and get on to Lalor's. I guess Ahmed an' I'll just hoist you on to the cart here."

So it was Lee Moon who had saved him, Lee Moon who had provided him with wealth, Lee Moon the despised Eurasian he had at times thought himself virtuous for having as a friend, Lee Moon made all the sacrifices. Instead of being a penniless tramp because he had had Lee Moon for a friend he was a wealthy man and had tangible proof of his wealth.

And in spite of his sorrow he slept the sleep of the man who has finished the last lap and is too utterly exhausted even to think.

THE stranger was right. He had lost count of time. It was two mornings after the day when she had seen Lee Moon making his last struggle

for life that Ruth was washing up the breakfast things when her brother and Bon Harcourt came toward her with a stranger walking between them.

"Here's a man just nipped through by the skin of his teeth," said Bon.

"I've told him we'll do what we can for him," said Reuben.

COLOR SYMBOLISM

by **H. P.**

THE favorite color of the American aborigines was red. The preference is racial and the mighty influence that established it was created in very ancient times, and doubtless had its origin in a higher state of society than the post-Columbus Indian ever knew.

But whatever his origin the Indian has clung to red as his favorite among the colors, and in his color symbolism, as found by the white men of modern times, red predominates for all that is virile.

European and Far-Eastern races, says Washington Matthews, "perhaps have systems as elaborate, but they are not generally employed, and knowledge of them is not so well diffused." The same authority says that the aborigines of this continent in painting and tattooing their persons, "usually followed established and rigid laws of symbolism, particularly in ceremonial decoration."

White men found many tribes using color symbols for the four points of the compass, and from this it may be deduced that at remoter times the practise was universal on the western continent. Some tribes designated three points in addition to the four cardinal points; namely the upper, middle and lower worlds. Four is a sacred number among most tribes. Seven is also sacred among the Creeks, Cherokees, Zuni, and many of the Plains tribes. The two numbers stand for the four cardinal points, plus the upper, middle and lower regions.

On the authority of Gatschet, the Apache symbolizes the compass as follows: East, black; South, white; West, yellow; North, blue. There's no color to represent the upper, middle, and lower regions. The Navaho, says Matthews, have two color charts, one applying to the surface of the earth and celestial regions; the second to the lower regions, where dwell witches, danger and death. In neither is red used. The first has: East, white; South, blue; West, yellow; North, black. Lower, white and black; Upper, blue. The second has black in the East and white in the North. The table for all other tribes listed by Matthews have red.

In the same order of direction as the above the Cherokee have, red, white, black, blue. Chippewa—white, green, red, black. Same tribe, second arrangement—red, green, white, black. Creek—white, blue, black, red and yellow. Hopi—white, red, blue, yellow. Lower, black; Upper, all colors. Omaha—red, black yellow, blue. Sioux the same as preceding. Zuni—white, red, blue, yellow; lower region, black. The colors of the four cardinal points as used by the Siouan tribes also symbolize Fire, Wind, Water, Earth. To the Cherokee red means strength, victory (Mooney). In their sacred formulas it is spoken of the "red war-whoop," the "red tomahawk," the "red war-path." They pray that their enemies may become "blue," a worse Fate than to wish "black," or "death" upon them. Peace and happiness is designated by white.

The same authority says—

"Red is a sacred color with all Indians and is usually symbolic of strength and success, and for this reason is a favorite for painting the face and body for the dance and war-path and for painting the war-pony, the lance, etc."

Black was generally a sign of mourning, white of peace. Day is red and night is black. The Hopi painted their prayer sticks red for war, and green for rain. The Navaho mingle the symbolism of the cardinal points with the symbolism of sex. The snow-clad mountains north of the Navaho country are black, or male-land. The south is blue, or female-land. With them black is male for all things, blue is female.

Kroeber says the Arapaho use white and yellow for male and female, respectively. The Hopi use red and yellow (south and north) for male, and white and blue or green for the female (east and west).

WAR WAMPUM

A Five-Part Story Part III

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The White Dawn," "Pay Gravel," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

MONTREAL had fallen and the Lilies were vanishing from the strongholds of Canada. Left without the support of their French allies, the Indians banded together to stand against the now dominant English. Pontiac directed the reign of terror and slaughter along the forest paths of the Alleghanies.

From Sandusky two forest-runners, Enoch Meekly and James Ballou traveled eastward in desperate haste to locate and warn Colonel Bouquet that Presq'Isle, Le Bœuf and Venango had fallen. Night overtook them two miles from Bushy Run, where their friend Steve Marks and his family lived; and, made uneasy by the prevalence of so many savages in the woods, the two runners went on at fresh speed.

They approached the place cautiously and found what they feared—a crowd of Indians besieging the Markses' cabin. They concealed themselves and saw Steve trying to make peace with the red chief, and killed treacherously from behind in consequence.

There were five other white men defending the cabin, and these decided to attempt an escape to the Byerly house a short distance away. Meekly and Ballou managed to join them; and the party, thus strengthened, retreated in the darkness on guard against the pursuing devils. Ballou learned that Marks' daughter, Nell, had been captured.

"Good God!" he babbled.

No one dared think what would happen to her in the hands of the savages.

The little band reached the Byerly place and spent a hideous night beating off the enemy.

Meanwhile one of the white men, Hance Whit, was frantic to begin the rescue of Nell, and, as a serious rival of Ballou, he fell into a hot quarrel which endangered the lives of all of them. The Indians started a fresh attack; but suddenly they scattered. The whites gave a shout of triumph and rushed out to meet Captain Joseph Dingly and a company of rangers who had come to the rescue.

The party now split up, Whit and Enoch going with Dingly and his men in search of the Marks girl, and Ballou with four others pushing on to carry word to Bouquet and to look for Mrs. Byerly—who was reported to have fled with her small children along the Fort Ligonier road but a short while ago. They saw nothing of the mother but had several encounters with the savages, which resulted in the loss of Smiley and Rickards. Ballou and his remaining companion continued on to the fort and arrived unhurt after running the gantlet of another war-party. The Byerlys had got in safely. Ballou told his news to the officer in command and then made ready, after a short rest, to proceed to his next objective—Bedford and Carlisle.

En route he neared the Shawnee Cabins and met an old Indian wearing a fearful medicine-mask. Black Beaver was alone and starving, and when Ballou gave him food he showed that he was likely to prove a valuable friend. He consulted his medicine and said that he would go with the white man. At first Ballou was suspicious.

"Some trick," he muttered, but he consented nevertheless.

They were within a mile of Bedford when they came upon a number of haymakers fighting for their lives against an onslaught of savages. Black Beaver donned his mask, and the attackers fled.

The whites then hurried to collect their dead and set out for the fort. Ballou was well received and reported to Captain Louis Ourry, who had charge of a pitifully small garrison there.

"*War Wampum*," *copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.*

When he and the captain were by themselves Ourry spoke of the desperate situation the place was in.

"Tell Bouquet I'll hold out as long as I live," he said.

THE journey to Carlisle revealed the remarkable tension and panic that the countryside was in. There were exaggerated rumors abroad regarding Indian depredations, and Ballou could do little to quiet the fears of the settlers. Carlisle was in great confusion; and the forest-runner and Black Beaver arrived to find Colonel Bouquet at his wits' end. After giving his report Ballou told the old soldier of Fort Ligonier's plight. The colonel was already aware of this and gave orders to send out a part of his small forces with word that he himself would follow soon.

At this moment they were interrupted by a commotion outside headquarters, and on going to investigate Ballou met a man newly arrived in town.

"I'm Gregory Dunn," the visitor stated.

Ballou couldn't help regarding him with suspicion, for the fellow was wearing among his scalps one that had belonged to an Indian woman and one to a boy. He discussed the red terror with Dunn for some time and finally asked if anything had been seen of the girl, Nell Marks.

"She is at the Great Island village on the west branch of the Susquehanna. I heard the warriors say they were taking her there," the stranger told him.

Ballou returned to Bouquet and related his interview. To his astonishment the colonel became greatly excited.

"Waste no time!" cried Bouquet. "We'll find this fellow and question him."

But when they went to get hold of Dunn the latter had disappeared.

The forest-runner talked with Black Beaver and was startled to hear him vilify the missing man.

"Among the Leni-lenape, his friends, he is called the Trade Knife," the Indian informed him.

Ballou knew then that he had let a notorious renegade escape. He now resolved to make a trip to Great Island in hope of locating Nell Marks. He and the Conestoga were on the point of leaving when they met up again with Hance Whit and Meekly. His old friend was eager to accompany them; but Whit decided to remain behind on account of his arm, which he had lately broken.

The two forest-runners and Black Beaver were soon traveling by canoe down the Susquehanna River. When they had made camp at the end of the day they were terrified by hearing a strange cry ring through the woods. They sat shivering about the fire, and suddenly the horrible scream sounded close by. Looking up, they saw a frightful apparition glaring through the bushes. The next moment it disappeared.

"Ga-go-sa!" cried Black Beaver.

None of them could sleep after that.

They continued their journey on foot, reaching a point opposite Great Island, began to scout the locality. Ballou swam across the river and captured a sleeping sentinel. The coup was soon discovered by the red men, and the distant bank was lighted up by excited searching-parties. Black Beaver, elated by this success, put on his mask and, diving into the water, went over and caught another of the enemy, who was wading near shore. The Leni-lenape were now thoroughly frightened, and in the uproar, the three friends discerned the Trade Knife, who evidently held an important position among the savages.

Ballou was growing more uneasy about Nell Marks and determined to do some scouting on his own account. He crossed the river and was making good progress when he fell into a "wampum trap."

The Indians were overjoyed by this catch. They hurried with their prisoner to Chief Tamaque. The whole camp began preparations for torture, and Ballou knew that his only hope for life lay in a precipitate rescue by his friends. The Knife taunted him and stated that the Marks girl had been taken to Pontiac's stronghold. He said also that the two men, recently murdered, had been found and brought back.

The fires were lighted and the skinning-knives sharpened. The white man was bound to a stake and the ceremony began. All at once what seemed to be a ghost appeared at the edge of the torture-place and stood next to the corpses of the Leni-lenape warriors.

The savages were overwhelmed with fear. They fled for their lives when a second ghoul—the one Ballou and his companions had seen before—came shrieking through the woods. Under cover of the confusion Black Beaver crept through the shadows and released his white brother. Quickly making their escape, the two were joined by Meekly, and they all sought refuge in the forest far from the haunts of Tamaque's fiends.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEST IS HALTED

THE only mishap to mar the journey to the Alleghany was a sprained ankle suffered by Meekly at the end of the short portage. On arriving at Venango at the mouth of French Creek it was deemed best to camp for a day or two and allow the veteran to recover from his hurt. Ballou inwardly chafed over the delay, but wilderness travel was ever creating tragedies out of what in the settlements would have been trifles. So they halted on the site of the ancient Seneca town and Black Beaver recalled its history and consulted his medicine-mask and wished himself far away from the gruesome spot.

The camp was pitched some distance from the ruins of the fort and the ghastly litter of what a few weeks before had been a garrison. Meekly and Ballou went once to view the ruins and the half-burned remains of the butchered soldiery. Muskets and other weapons, ruined by the fire, were scattered through the ground-works. The Conestoga, despite his dread of the place, seemed to be drawn to the scene, for he visited it several times.

Meekly and Ballou reckoned the history of the town to begin with the arrival of Captain Chalbert de Joncaire in 1753 to inform the Indians of the coming of a French army, and when John Frasier, gunsmith and trader, was driven out and forced to find a new home on the Monongahela.

Black Beaver considered its historic period to have ended when the Senecas were succeeded by a mixed population of Shawnees, Delawares, Wyandottes, and other tribes allied to the French. The Beaver knew how the coming of the French had aroused the fears of the Iroquois, as well as of the Shawnees and Delawares at Logstown some eighty miles to the south.

It was not until 1754 that Joncaire succeeded in partly allaying the suspicions of the Indians so that he might venture to build a fort. During the French-Indian war this stronghold was the center of French influence on the upper Alleghany.

In 1759 a thousand warriors were gathered there in readiness to raid the lower country. Fort Venango, now in ruins, was built by the English in 1760, and was garrisoned by a small band under Lieutenant Gordon. Poor Gordon was kept alive for several days before death mercifully released him. As the white men reckoned history the place had been a center of trade and intrigue for ten years.

Its contact with the white race had prompted the governor of Virginia to send Major George Washington and Christopher Gist to warn the French they were trespassing upon colonial soil. It ceased to be of strategic importance after Gordon and his men were massacred in June.

"Ganagarah'hare is ended!" said Black Beaver, giving the place its ancient name. "The ghosts are very thick here. My medicine tells me my white brother's foot is strong enough to walk."

"I'd rather have some bear grease to rub on my foot than any amount of Injun medicine," mumbled Meekly, taking care the Conestoga should not catch his words. For after all there was nothing gained by flouting a red medicine. Aloud he assured the Conestoga, "With the next sun we will go to what is left of Le Bœuf."

"We'll only be losing time if we start before your ankle is all well," morosely observed Ballou. "Let's eat."

Just before arriving at the village he had shot a deer and, as there were no fresh Indian signs within several miles of the ruined fort, the Conestoga had broiled a large supply of the meat. Three bark platters were heaped high with the venison and placed on a flat rock. The men fell to and ate as only forest dwellers can eat after living on scanty rations. Without warning a long arm shot through the bushes and over Ballou's shoulder, and clutched at a large piece of meat. Automatically Meekly's hand darted forward and grasped the intruder's wrist and was pulling him from the bushes and over Ballou's bowed back.

The Conestoga gave a faint yelp and dived to secure his wooden mask from beneath his blanket. Ballou swung up his ax. Meekly's free hand stayed the descent of the weapon, while he sharply warned—

"It's that poor cuss, Rickards!"

He pulled the demented man to a sitting posture so that the three of them might stare at him. Rickards' face showed no emotion. His mouth hung half open, but he did not attempt to sound his weird cry. The dull eyes lightened with animal intelligence as he beheld the food, and with a grunting noise he began cramming hunks of meat into his gaping mouth. He was starving and he would have bolted several pounds of the venison had not Ballou restrained him.

"Rickards, don't you know me, Jarvis Ballou?" he asked. "Don't you remember the Forbes road and the fight? Don't you remember the Byerly cabin and how your moccasins hurt your feet after we took to the road——"

"The snake!" wildly exclaimed Rickards, striving to rise to his feet.

"Eat. Chew your meat. There is no snake. Meat. Eat it," soothed Ballou.

Then to Meekly:

"This is the ghost that's been trailing us. Glad I didn't shoot him at the camp across from Great Island."

Rickards subsided and resumed swallowing the venison as fast as Ballou cut it for him. Black Beaver wanted to present his mask for the unfortunate man to gaze upon, but Meekly warned him:

"It'll make him cry very loud. Put it under the blanket. A ghost laid a hand on his head. Now he is trying to be a man again."

The Conestoga concealed the mask, but he would not sit near Rickards. To him the man was the representation of some

uncanny force; and he took his platter to the shore of the creek and listened often to what the protruding lips of the mask had to tell him.

Rickards quickly became docile and ate only as Ballou apportioned the meat in small pieces. That his mind was still under a cloud was shown by his manner of staring at his two companions without seeming to recognize them. That he was improved somewhat was evidenced by his silence and his fleeting recollection of the snake. How he had managed to follow them was a mystery until the Conestoga found a second canoe beached near the mouth of the creek. Some instinct had sent him after the white men instead of after Tamaque's band, although he would not have been harmed by the latter.

After he had eaten all that Ballou dared to permit he threw himself down and instantly was asleep. His clothing was torn to tatters; his legs and feet were one mass of bruises and scratches. He was emaciated to a degree that caused the forest-runners to marvel at his endurance. His only weapon was a knife, worn in a belt made from a vine.

"Been living on cherries and such truck," mused Ballou as he stared at the long thin face and the half-opened mouth. "No better than a natural. What can we do with him? Turn him loose and he'll soon die. Take him with us— No! He shan't slow up our business."

"Let's wait till morning," suggested Meekly. "Mebbe food and sleep will make him fit for traveling till we can leave him somewhere. Mebbe he's coming out of it."

As they must wait over another night for Meekly's ankle to improve Ballou had no objections to offer; but he knew he would never allow the welfare of Rickards to put his quest in hazard.

The capture of the three posts along the Lake Erie-Fort Pitt road had torn a wide gap in the Alleghany river line of defenses. The hole extended from the lake to Pitt itself, and through this opening the Indians had poured to ravish the frontiers. A month earlier and Ballou and his two friends would have been smothered by the inrushing raiders. But now they were behind the red line and had the creek to themselves until some of the war-parties began to return.

In the morning Rickards showed further improvement. He continued to be stupid of facial expression yet was quiet. When Ballou told him to collect dry wood for the fire he promptly obeyed, and all the sticks he brought were as they should be. He would not talk, however, although Meekly endeavored to stir his memory. He wore a dirty rag around his left forearm, and when Ballou offered to investigate the nature of his hurt he became quite wild. On being left alone he soon quieted down. Later on he slyly removed the bandage, and the Conestoga spied upon him and told his friends the arm was unmarked by any wound.

Meekly approached him and said:

"The snake didn't bite you. Do you understand?"

Rickard's face twisted in frantic fear, or fancied pain, and he clapped a hand over his arm and withdrew to the edge of the woods. After being ignored for an hour he crept back to the fire and ate wolfishly of the deer meat. Ballou said:

"If he was as crazy as he was at Great Island we'd put off without him. As he seems to understand some things he can come along until he breaks loose again. We'll use both canoes. He must have followed at the heels of Tamaque's band after he quit us in the Forbes road. 'Low Tamaque is glad to be rid of him and his yowling."

The Conestoga, while losing much of his fear of Rickards, refused to enter his canoe. Meekly volunteered. Ballou and the Indian took the lead, and their water journey to Le Bœuf was uneventful. They visited the ruins of the rude blockhouse. This marked the end of the portage from Lake Erie and the beginning of canoe travel to the Ohio valley; and as Ensign George Price and his thirteen Royal Americans had escaped even while the structure was in flames, and while the Wyandottes had waited by the door to tomahawk them as they came out, there was lacking those evidences of Indian savagery which marked the ruins of Venango.

Some distance from the ruins, and on the Presqu' Isle road, Ballou, scouting alone, came upon the mutilated remains of the express Ensign Price had started out at the beginning of the attack. Ballou said nothing of this discovery to his friends.

The Conestoga was now willing to work with Rickards, and the two smoked what

was left of the deer meat while Meekly and Ballou concealed the two canoes. They took to their blankets early and rested until after sunrise. Presqu' Isle was but a few miles to the north, and the road was well worn because of the large quantities of goods and supplies carried over it during the French occupancy.

Black Beaver scouted ahead and Meekly brought up the rear. Ballou was annoyed at Rickards' persistence in keeping close at his side. The man's face was losing some of its stupidity, thanks to sleep and nourishing food. Ballou impatiently demanded:

"Why wear that rag on your arm? You are not hurt."

"Snake!" whispered Rickards, his eyes rolling.

"Stop it!" sternly commanded Ballou. "Stop it; or I'll send you into the woods. No snake has touched you."

Rickards frowned at his arm, then turned piteously to Ballou. Ballou scowled and shook his head. Rickards tore off the rag and flung it one side and then fawned on Ballou for approbation. Ballou smiled and told him:

"You're all right. Nothing can hurt you. Now watch the trail and the woods."

WITHOUT hindrance they came to Presqu' Isle. The stockaded fort and several stout cabins had been considered a very strong defense. Ensign John Christie believed he could hold it against all the Indians Pontiac might send. But while the blockhouse was very strongly built it was of wood and most disadvantageously situated. It stood on a narrow tongue of land between the creek and the lake and was commanded by the ridges on each of two sides. For three days the enemy had poured in a galling fire and finally set the blockhouse in blaze with pitch-tipped arrows.

Among the two hundred Wyandottes bent on reducing the fort was a former English soldier, adopted son of the Wyandottes. This man advised Christie to surrender and escape being massacred. Christie finally agreed to do this and he and his men were taken to Detroit as prisoners; although for a long time it was believed on the Pennsylvania frontier that the entire garrison had met the fate of those at Venango.

After Ballou and Meekly had poked about in the ruins they were convinced the soldiers had been taken away alive; for there were no bones. They did find several hanks of hair which had been cut off close to the scalp, but these were additional proofs that some of the captives had been washed free from their white blood and were now painted and garbed and accepted as red men.

"Some of the cusses lucky 'nough to be 'dopted into the tribe," said Meekly.

Ballou walked down the spit of land and looked out on the lake. It was in a gentle mood; and Ballou decided—

"If we can find a canoe we'll go by water as long as the weather will let us."

Meekly assented to this plan and became busy searching for a concealed birch. He found one up the west shore most cunningly concealed and soon paddled it back to the mouth of the creek. Pausing at the ruins only long enough to eat, the four took to the canoe and made ten miles before drawing ashore to camp for the night.

For three days they pushed their way westward without sighting an Indian afloat or ashore. In the afternoon of the third day a strong gale whipped down from the northeast and they were glad to seek refuge in the mouth of the Cuyahoga. This was the haven where Major Robert Rogers and his two hundred famous rangers landed from their whaleboats in the fall of 1760 when on the way to take over the forts lost by the French.

The canoe was drawn up on the bank and concealed and a fire was soon blazing on the ashes left by Rogers' men. When the Conestoga took his bow and arrows to go out for small game Meekly and Ballou were surprized to have Rickards point at Meekly's rifle, and then at the Conestoga. Meekly disliked being separated from his gun but gave his permission. And it was Rickards who shot a deer within a mile of the camp while Black Beaver brought back squirrels only.

Praise was lavished on Rickards who appeared to be as pleased as a little child. His mental state had improved enough for him to comprehend simple commands, but any efforts to induce him to talk were fruitless. And it was that night on the Cuyahoga that for the first time since joining the rescue-party he gave away to his unnatural howling. A water-snake was the cause, and after he had been silenced he sat for several hours close by the fire with the old vacuous

expression dulling his eyes. Yet he understood when Ballou angrily threatened to abandon him did he cry out again; for he made a strong effort to control the inclination.

The gale kept up through the night and by morning a heavy sea was pounding on the exposed shore. Meekly was for waiting until the wind died down, but Ballou, hot with the desire to be traveling, insisted the wind might blow for a week.

"We must leave the canoe and make Sandusky bay afoot," he said.

He had his way; and they shouldered their blankets and meat and set out along a faint trail that followed the shore line. They had proceeded two or three miles from the river when Rickards amazed them by saying—

" 'Pears to me some one's comin' behind us."

After recovering from his surprize Meekly chuckled and remarked to Ballou—

"The cuss is getting to be quite a talker."

"Good sign. But he's still crazy. Thinks some one is following us."

Rickards was in no way perturbed by his thoughts as was shown by his indifference to the back-trail and his willingness to travel leisurely. They came to a stretch of swampy land, extending inland for several miles and rather than to lose time in rounding the head of this indentation they crossed it by leaping from hummock to hummock.

He who should have been the surest of foot, the Conestoga, slipped and went into the water and muck up to his waist. Rickards, most clumsy of the four, was afraid of the stagnant water, perhaps fearing snakes, and although he swayed and slipped and scrambled frantically he reached firm footing without any mishap. They picked up the trail on the other side and were following it up a gentle slope through a tangled growth of small timber when Rickards again warned—

" 'Pears to me some one's coming behind us."

"Wish he'd quit that sort of talk," grumbled Ballou. "Makes me feel jumpy when any one keeps harping on one thing."

"When a man's crazy one silly notion follers another. If they didn't he wouldn't be crazy," Meekly philosophically remarked.

The Conestoga knew enough English to catch the import of Rickards' words, but as he was attributing supernatural powers to the man he insisted that the warning be literally repeated to him. Ballou impatiently complied with his request, using the tongue of the Delaware.

The Conestoga came to a halt and unwrapped the wooden mask, the protection of which had caused him to plunge into the green-scummed water. Rickards trembled on beholding the grotesque visage, but he did not cry out, or offer to run away. Black Beaver pressed an ear to the swollen lips and remained motionless for a few moments. Then he gravely informed them—

"The False-faces whisper for us to look behind us."

Disgusted that the Indian should give free rein to his superstitious fancies because of the speech of a half-witted man, Ballou was for advancing and leaving the Conestoga to follow when his whim would permit. But Meekly was impressed by the double warning; and he stared down the narrow slit formed by the trail and observed:

"If any Injuns happen to be snooping on our trail this is a mighty good place to meet 'em. Of course I don't believe anything a natural may say, yet mebbe Rickards has larned something we don't know. As for the Injun, while I don't go in for believing red medicine yet it ain't to be sneezed at all the time. If there ain't no Injuns coming we won't lose only a bit of time. If there is, this is the spot to take the heart out of 'em."

And he examined his priming and pressed back into the growth.

With a mumbled oath Ballou followed his example, Rickards crowding in beside him. The Conestoga took up a position next to Meekly and below him. Several minutes passed, each seeming an hour to the distressed lover; then the Conestoga made a soft hissing noise. Four Indians, naked and painted black, emerged from the growth and came to the edge of the swamp. They came in single file, each carrying a musket and an ax in his hands.

Ballou had seen Indians go into battle, stripped and painted black, but never had encountered them on a scout before. He quickly reasoned they were not scouts but members of some large band that had happened upon the fresh camp-fire on the Cuyahoga. Doubtless they had found the canoe and in anticipation of the owner's return had stripped and prepared for a fight.

These four had happened upon the signs left by the white men and had followed the trail thinking to win all the honors by taking them by surprize. He drew his knife and whispered for his companions to refrain from firing, as the main body might be within hearing of a gun-shot. At least three of the men in ambush thoroughly appreciated the strategic importance of their position. If the savages went around or crossed the swamp they must ultimately ascend the narrow path and walk into the trap.

The four black figures examined the ground for a few moments, then the leader pointed to the imprint of a moccasin and waving his ax leaped to a hummock. When he was nearly across another started. It would have been an easy task for the forest-runners to have knocked over at least two of the four, but there was the danger of their rifles carrying the news to the main band. As the second savage joined his mate at the foot of the slope the third warrior crossed, then the fourth. In single file and separated only by a few feet they trotted up the trail, none seeming to have a suspicion of the trap ahead.

Rickards remained quiet, his eyes staring. The others realized that none of the four should be allowed to escape. The Conestoga waited until three of the men had passed him and the fourth was opposite his hiding-place. Stifling his ardent desire to sound his war-cry he leaped upon the last of the file. Almost at the same moment Meekly became similarly engaged.

These two assaults were commenced before the first two warriors had quite reached Ballou's position, and they started to wheel about. They raised their guns, but the two couples were revolving so furiously that it was almost impossible to use even a knife or an ax with certainty. They dropped their useless muskets and were about to aid their companions when Ballou and Rickards shot from the growth. Rickards secured a terrible grip on the throat of one while Ballou's adversary slipped from his grasp, the thickly greased body making it most difficult to maintain a hold.

With a growl Rickards reverted to the terrible rough and tumble style of fighting practised by backwoodsmen when no holds were barred, and broke his man's neck. Then he stood motionless and stared stupidly down on the lifeless form, as if marveling that such a terrible engine for destruction could so suddenly become inert simply because of a certain twist and wrench of two naked hands and arms.

Ballou leaped again upon his opponent and endeavored to secure the hand holding the ax. Again the grapse foiled him and he went down on his knees. With a howl of triumph the savage lifted his ax and then crumpled in a heap under the impact of a two-pound stone between the eyes. Rickards had made the cast.

The warrior was dead, the front of his head crushed in, but to make sure Ballou gave him a thrust with his knife as he passed on to aid Meekly and the Conestoga. The battle was going against the former, who had brought a giant of a fellow to the ground only to be flopped over on his back, the savage's knees impeding him from using knife or ax. The warrior lifted his ax and opened his mouth to sound his whoop of triumph, and toppled over on his side with Ballou's long knife through his throat. Before Ballou could turn about to aid the Conestoga the Beaver was sounding his war-cry and waving a scalp above his head.

Rickards remained in the path, glancing from the man he had killed with his hands to the one he had slain with the rock. He refused to touch the hair of either and Meekly and Ballou took the scalps and presented them to the Conestoga as an offering to his medicine.

"Hope the other —— ain't heard the Beaver's cat-wauling," panted Meekly, who was displeased with himself for the poor showing he had made.

"Lend a hand, Rickards. You must help us carry these men to the swamp. We must get rid of them and their weapons," said Ballou.

Rickards was averse to the grim task but did aid in carrying the dead down to the border of the swamp. He refused, however, to approach close to the slimy water, and the three had to inter the slain and toss in the weapons after them without the woodsman's aid. As they hastened back up the trail Ballou remarked—

"That teaches us not to make any more fires unless we're mighty careful."

Then to Rickards and speaking gruffly—

"Much obliged to you for heaving that rock."

" 'Peared to me some one was behind us," timidly replied Rickards as he tried to wipe the grease from his hands with some leaves.

Meekly was much disgruntled:

"Not much boasting for you or me to do, Jarvis," he growled. "You had to save my hide and the witless one saved yours. He'n the Beaver are the only ones to count coup. But my feller was slippery's ——!"

"Anyway, they're dead," said Ballou. "Hope the Beaver's yelling wasn't heard. There must be a big band near here. But how did Rickards know we were being chased?"

"Saw off the crane! Don't waste time asking a old fool any questions," Meekly snapped back. "He's crazy as a loon. Mebbe that's why he knew. Let's be picking up our heels."

Now the Conestoga could not walk close enough to Rickards. The man's medicine had anticipated the medicine of the wooden-face. Some powerful spirit had taken away his mind so as to make room for a medicine mind. One mentally afflicted had no need for woodcraft, for he was safe to wander openly. The white man carried no fetish and yet his medicine eyes saw things hidden by obstacles and distance. The red man must have and carry with him a fetish, but in compensation for its aid he must continually be making sacrifices and feasts for it and even protecting it.

If these propitiations are neglected the fetish no longer functions for the welfare of the owner. The white man was troubled by none of these details. It was not even necessary for him to take the scalps of the warriors his supernatural power had permitted him to slay.

THAT night they made a dark camp and the Beaver utilized the last of the fading day to mount his scalps on hoops and hang them up to dry. Before resuming their journey in the morning the white men waited for the Beaver to make a scout ahead, for the tangled growth covering that section of the country was not adapted to a hurried flight should they encounter the enemy.

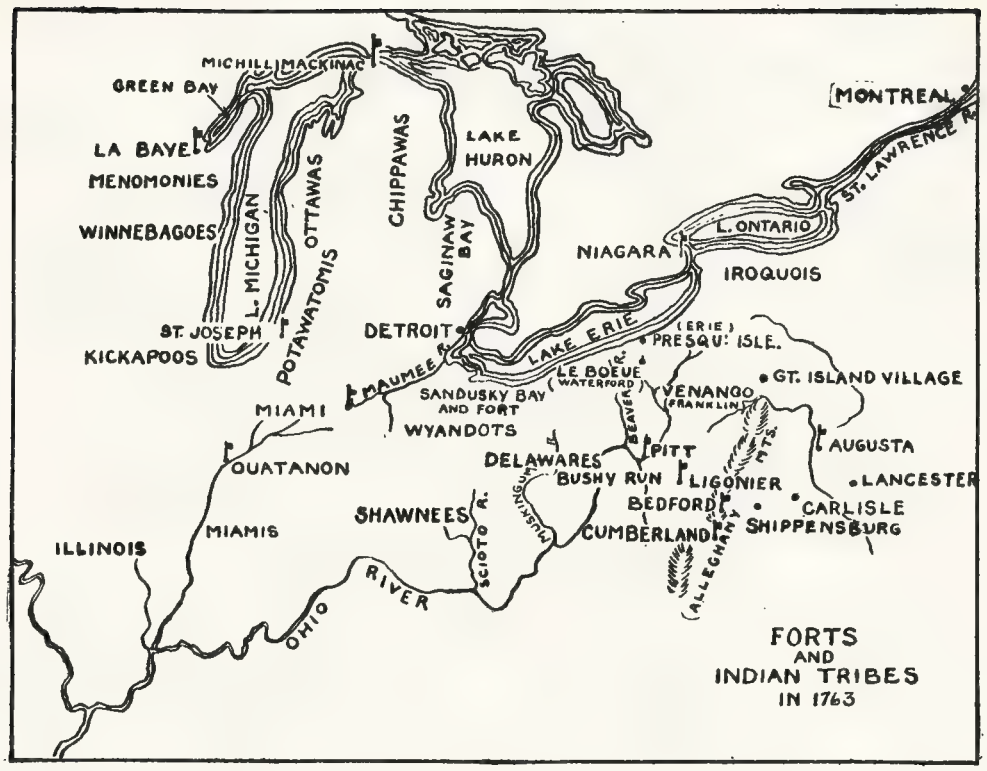
The Conestoga reported the trail was clear but that he had detected a faint haze in the west which he believed to be smoke. Meekly and Ballou climbed to the top of a tall tree, but, though they could gaze for miles over the forest crown, neither could discover any haze, let alone a smoke. That day's travel was ended several hours before sunset. They were losing no time, however, as Black Beaver scouted far ahead and eliminated any delay on the morrow. He was back before the light failed and reported as before. He found no signs of Indians and insisted they were safe in building a fire after dusk came to hide the tell-tale smoke. He wished for a smoke in which to hang his scalps. His explanation for the presence of the four warriors at the swamp was accepted by Meekly and Ballou.

A large band of Indians from the west had gone along the coast in canoes and had put in at the Cuyahoga and had found the fresh ashes of the camp-fire. The white men's trail had been also discovered as well as the canoe. Believing the white men were out hunting and would return to resume their journey in the canoe they had stripped and painted for war. Then four of the younger and more ambitious warriors had stolen forth to waylay their victims as they returned to camp.

The Indians on the river would wait a reasonable length of time for the missing warriors to return. They would be loath to abandon their canoes and follow a trail which would be old before they entered upon it. But to make sure there was no danger stealing along the back-trail the Conestoga arose before sunrise and scouted to the east. He found nothing to alarm him. He was convinced they were not being pursued. He appealed to Rickards to use his medicine-eyes and confirm his report.

Rickards did not seem to hear him, and the afflicted man's silence was sufficient assurance for the Indian. From tree-tops Meekly and Ballou again scanned the western heavens. This time they did make out a slight haze, but decided it was caused by atmospheric conditions rather than by smoke. Black Beaver having pronounced it to be smoke said nothing more. Since the fight at the swamp Rickards had seldom spoken. Very often he lifted his huge, hairy hands and stared at them as if surprized at something. His mind was far from normal, but his docility, especially when Ballou told him to do something, made him a help rather than a hindrance.

With no lessening of caution they drew near the marsh lands of Sandusky Bay, where Orontony, the great war-chief of the Hurons, brought some of his people from the Detroit River in 1745 when conspiring to drive the French out of the western country. By a peculiar twist of fate the



very tribes to follow Orontony in the desultory war against the French at Detroit were now being led by Pontiac against the English.

It was seven years since Orontony burned his village and stockade at Sandusky and moved his Wyandottes, as his band came to be called, to the Illinois country. Now the Wyandottes were back on the marshes and aiding Pontiac. And, as at the other stages of their journey, the four travelers knew they would find at Sandusky the ruins of an English fort, but they did not expect to find any savages there, now that the fort was destroyed and Ensign Christopher Paully and his dozen soldiers were prisoners in Pontiac's camp at Detroit.

They halted two miles from the Indian town to make a camp. Meekly and Ballou scouted ahead to find a canoe with which they could make a night trip up the end of the lake and gain Fort Detroit from the river. On reaching a break in the forest they were astounded to behold smoke rising from many fires and to see many Indians lounging about the ruins of the blockhouse and its ruined stockade.

"This is very bad," muttered Ballou. "There must be a good two hundred fighting men there. At the worst I'd expected to find only a small band. Something big must be on foot."

"Two things is sartain," Meekly murmured. "They haven't bothered to throw out any scouts, and that shows they don't figger on any white men being anywhere near here. There ain't no squaws or children; which means it's war pow-wow and ain't intended to last very long. Guess we'll have to wait till they begin to thin out."

Warriors strolled from the camp and across the marsh toward the lake. One group walked toward the woods but halted before making it necessary for the forest-runners to retire. There were six of them and they were listening with close attention to an Indian who was of much darker complexion than the average red man. Meekly made a queer noise in his throat and pushed the barrel of his rifle through some bushes. Ballou caught his arm just in time to prevent a shot.

"Are you crazy like Rickards?" he fiercely demanded, fearing in very truth his old friend's mind was affected.

"——! Now I've lost my chance. Now I can't bore him!" groaned Meekly as the Indians turned back to the village with the dark-skinned one in the lead.

"Come away! Come away!" coaxed Ballou. "Your shot would have brought the whole parcel of them down on us. We must be getting back and shift the camp farther away, or Rickards will be doing something."

"You don't understand," hissed Meekly, breathing like a spent runner. "Old Amherst would give two thousand pounds for the hair of the dark Injun who was doing the talking!"

Ballou stared at him questioningly and was finding the answer in his own mind, when Meekly nodded his head and softly exclaimed:

"Gawdfrey! To think the cuss got away. Yes; he's Pontiac. Now you know why I was willing to risk all our lives for the sake of one shot."

Ballou quickly reminded him:

"And if you'd killed him you would have spoiled our chances of getting Nell Marks back. If you'd shot him the Indians would have burned every prisoner they have; burned them in sight of the fort."

"I think a heap of the gal," mumbled Meekly, "but Pontiac's death would break up the war. God knows I wouldn't go to harm Steve Marks' gal, but I wonder just what price we should pay to stop the killings from the New York frontier clear down to the Cherokee country! I wonder how many more white men and women will go the stake or into Huron kettles just 'cause I didn't take that shot!"

"Such talk is bad," hoarsely protested Ballou as he rose to return to their camp. "The first thing on earth I'm bound to do is to get the girl back to the settlements. That's what I come for; that's what Hance Whit would do if he was in my place. And even if you'd killed Pontiac that wouldn't stop the Ohio Indians from carrying on the war. They was following a red path before Pontiac raised the ax. And I believe they'll keep on fighting after the Three Fires find they haven't any meat for Winter and their men must scatter for the hunting."

A wailing chorus at the eastern edge of the marsh, where the bay opens into the lake, sent them back to the bushes. A long string of canoes was making in from the lake and slowly moving toward the village. By the time the first of the canoes had grounded a large number of warriors had run down to learn the cause of the mournful chanting. As the other canoes came up and took their places at the muddy landing the warriors from the village fell back to give them room to come ashore and form in a procession.

The white men saw two canoes lifted clear of the mud and to the shore. They were deeply puzzled to see some of the newcomers pick up these canoes and carry them through the camp to the Wyandotte village huts. There was no mistaking the note of lamentation in the chanting which they kept up. As they advanced those Indians who had come from camp and village fell in and took up the melancholy dirge.

"Can't hear what they're yowling," whispered Meekly. "Something's happened that's rubbed ag'in the grain."

"Making a new medicine?" ventured Ballou.

"It ain't a medicine song. And you can't see any of their mystery-men. And their fetching along them canoes is something new to me."

They watched the strange scene until the lithe and muscular figure of Pontiac went forth to meet the procession. He was about fifty years of age, but his step was that of a youth. Behind him walked a tall Indian whom Meekly said was Ninivois, chief of the Fox Indians, and next came Take, chief of the Hurons.

"They're Pontiac's two best men," Meekly informed his friend. "It must be something big to fetch the three of them down here from Detroit. I'm thinking Pontiac plans to quit Detroit long enough to help Tamaque and t'others to smash Fort Pitt."

"They're blocking our road to the north. They're standing between us and Nell Marks," snarled Ballou.

"We'd better be hustling back before Rickards sees another snake and goes crazy again."

They drew back from the bush growth and entered the silent woods and made haste to reach their camp. Before they sighted their hiding-place they could hear Rickards laughing and sobbing hysterically.

"He's broke out again!" groaned Ballou, glancing apprehensively about on all sides in an expectation of beholding furtive forms

gliding toward the tiny opening enclosed by thick evergreens.

When they crawled under the thick boughs a strange sight met their gaze. Rickards was seated and had paused in the act of tying a piece of dressed deerskin around his left arm. Black Beaver was squatting before him and holding up the wooden mask. It was plain the white man had had a recurrence of his madness and once more was imagining he was dressing a snake-bite.

"What is the matter with him?" demanded Ballou with only his head and shoulders protruding from under the boughs.

Black Beaver did not move a muscle as he softly replied:

"A big snake crawled by his foot. It was one that has no death in his bite, but the white man began to see and hear ghosts. The medicine of the False-face is keeping him from giving his ghost-cry. Let the white men be very still."

He kept his beady eyes staring at Rickards, and it did seem to the two spectators as if the unfortunate were gradually submitting to some weird influence. His sobbing-laughing mood slowly passed away and his gaze became fixed on the wooden mask. He did not sense the return of his two companions, nor did he attempt to finish tying the deerskin bandage. His fingers loosened their hold on the patch of skin and the bandage fell unheeded to the ground. Then with a little shiver he sank back and closed his eyes. Black Beaver drew a deep breath and relaxed, and proudly murmured:

"The Ga-go-sa put him to sleep so he will forget the snake. What did my white brothers find?"

Ballou described all they had seen, and at mention of Pontiac the Conestoga shivered and glanced uneasily about him. Then his gaze rested on the mask, and his shoulders went back and his head went up.

"The Conestoga's medicine is stronger than Pontiac's," he muttered. "But this is a bad place to be in. If there are many warriors in the village they must have much meat to eat. Men will be running through the woods to find meat. We must go a long way back into the forest."

"Hunters will not come out now. They stay to sing in the camp," said Ballou. "But it is wise to move our camp deep into the woods. You three go back while I steal around the village and make for Detroit and learn from Major Gladwin what he has heard about a woman prisoner."

"I'll poke along with you just to see what the fort looks like," mildly said Meekly.

"The Beaver goes north," announced the Conestoga. Then he asked, "But what becomes of the man who talks with ghosts?"

"He must look to the ghosts to take care of him," replied Ballou. "He is safe with any Indians. We are not. And the girl comes first."

Meekly sorrowfully agreed to this. He knew it must be so, and yet it was abnormal in his mind to abandon the unfortunate man. Yet it was more abhorrent to think of allowing anything to come between Nell Marks and a rescue.

"Poor devil!" he said regretfully with a side glance at the sleeping man. "His only danger will be from starving. If the Injuns pick him up they'll see he gits enough to eat. But if he runs away like a crazy loon he'll end with his ribs showing through the rags of his shirt."

"The Indians won't harm him," muttered Ballou absent-mindedly. "Even Pontiac would not dare harm a crazy man."

Rickards opened his eyes and stared foolishly for a moment, and then lazily remarked—

" 'Pears to me there's too many folks 'round here."

"Only the three of us," soothed Meekly.

"Too many folks 'round here. They're out of sight, but they're comin' closer all the time," mumbled Rickards.

Black Beaver stared at the speaker uneasily and was filled with a desire to scout the immediate vicinity. To the white men he said:

"There was the swamp and the four naked men painted black. Our brother saw them coming long before they were in sight. Even the *Orchinakenda* of the Iroquois could not have sharper eyes. Now he sees other men coming to us. Wait here until the bearer of the False-face goes to see how near Pontiac's men are."

HE THREADED a thong through two holes in the top of the mask and slipped the loop over his head so that the False-face rested on his back with the ugly visage leering over his back-trail. This to guard him against an attack from

behind. Armed only with his knife and ax he paused to boast:

"The Ga-go-sa will turn me into a snake if Pontiac's men get too near. Do not let our medicine-brother kill a snake, as it may be the last of the Conestogas." Then he was on his stomach and wriggling under the heavy boughs and was outside the tiny enclosure.

Ballou and Meekly suddenly discovered they were alarmed; the more so as they did not know what move to make. Each was oppressed with a feeling of dread. Each visioned a deep circle of malevolent faces creeping closer to their hiding place. It was the shadow of Pontiac they felt. Yet to leave the dense thicket of evergreens, hampered as they were by Rickards, might mean discovery and capture within the first fifty rods.

"If we could get a start with none of the —— heading us off!" whispered Ballou.

"They're either on all sides, or they ain't anywhere near us," replied Meekly. "Bah! Why should we give ear to a crazy man's talk?"

"So say I. And yet, there was the swamp."

"Rickards won't be hurt less he's killed before they can git a squint at his foolish face," continued Meekly. "Black Beaver can pretend he's a Seneca come to join Pontiac. And that leaves plain —— for you'n me. No, Jarvis; not so bad as that. Leaves only me. You've got to play a mighty slick game, Jarvis. You've got to make 'em believe you're a Frenchman what hates the English. Now I'll dig out."

"We ain't separating any," growled Ballou. "Besides, we may be getting scared at nothing."

"Don't be as big a fool as Rickards, for you ain't got any medicine to take care of you," replied Meekly. "We're bound to be discovered with all them reds to be fed and all their hunters walking through the woods. Nothing on two hoofs can catch me if I can git a mite of a start. I'll steal a canoe and make Fort Detroit and wait for you if I git there first. You'n the Beaver will say you found a crazy man in the woods. If Rickards begin to show any reason clip him vastly over the head with the flat of your ax so's you can git time to tell him to keep being crazy. Mebbe I'll learn where they took Nell Marks before you can sneak away and reach the fort."

Ballou rested his elbows on his knees and held his head between his hands. The mention of the girl's name had restored much of his natural audacity of spirit. He sought to discover some way out of their dilemma which would not necessitate separating from his old friend. At last he lifted his head and sighed:

"Can't seem to think of anything except that I might pretend to be the Trade Knife. He never ranged north much, if any. None of the Lake Indians ever saw him unless it was on a war-path when he was painted up like any warrior. But for the life of me, Enoch, I can't find a place for you to fit in."

"Never you mind about old Enoch. He's all —— and repeat when it comes to snooping 'round alone."

"Too danged many folks round here," muttered Rickards.

The boughs lifted and the Conestoga squirmed inside the hiding-place. His chest was rising and falling rapidly and the sweat was thick on his painted face.

"Hunters are going out on many paths. We will be found, my medicine says. It whispers it will be very bad for us to be found; that we must go out and find them."

Meekly readily agreed to this bit of wisdom and told the Indian of his plan which would give a precarious breathing-spell to all but himself. And he concluded by unselfishly announcing—

"The sooner I be digging out the better it'll be for all of us."

He snatched up his rifle and would have departed at once had not the Conestoga commanded:

"Wait, white man. You are a wise man. But the False-faces are whispering to me that an ax will be stuck in your head before the moon rises if you leave your brothers. The Faces are wiser than my white brother. They say we must keep together and enter Pontiac's camp as if mats were waiting for us once we see we are to be caught. I will make our brother into the Trade Knife."

He opened his paint-bag and arranged his brushes of beaten bark and motioned for Ballou to remove his hunting-shirt.

Meekly tarried, held more by curiosity then because of any intention of keeping with his friends. Ballou reluctantly peeled off his fringed shirt. The Conestoga encircled the lean, brown face with a ribbon of bear's grease and daubed dots of red and white upon it. Next he painted a gridiron

of stripes from hair to chin and from ear to ear. When he had made the last stroke there was no recognizing Ballou. On the bronzed chest the Indian laid on a background of red and painted upon this in black a long knife. The long hair he gathered together and arranged into two braids and stuck a feather, taken from his own hair, just below the scalp-lock.

"——!" muttered Meekly. "Jarvis Ballou's gone away and the —— is standing in his moccasins! If I only had some hair I might be turned into a Injun!"

"Too many folks crowdin' 'round," peevishly complained Rickards.

Believing that every word Rickards uttered contained much medicine the Beaver again insisted on a literal interpretation. When his request had been granted he gestured for them to be silent and for Ballou to roll his shirt in his blanket. He restored his paints and brushes and again left the covert. This time he was gone only a few minutes. On reappearing his small eyes fairly glittered with excitement.

"We must go out and call to them," he whispered. "They will stumble upon us very soon. They come from all directions. It will be bad to be found. We must be on our way to find them when seen."

"We've talked that into a dozen belts. Meekly isn't to be left to shift for himself," fiercely protested Ballou.

"Our white brother here must go as your prisoner."

Meekly and Ballou stared at him in amazement. Then admiration crept into their gaze.

"Well, ding me most mortal!" gasped Meekly. "There's a idee for you, Jarvis. But he's got the right notion. The Beaver has all the medicine in this party. Quick! Tie my hands at my back. Hitch a long cord 'round my neck. Black Beaver git some briers and scratch my face, or else use your knife p'int. I can't use my hands and have been falling down most vastly."

The Conestoga at once began searching for briers. Ballou was loath to lead his old friend into a hostile Indian camp. The Beaver brought briers and not only made scratches on Meekly's face but very artfully stuck nettles and briers into his clothing. Ballou was stirred to action when a low birdlike call sounded between them and the bay.

Then he took the cord furnished by the Indian and tied it around his friend's neck and gave the prisoner's rifle and belt weapons to the Conestoga to carry. With the Beaver ranging ahead and sounding the discovery cry of the Senecas the two forest-runners in their rôles of captor and prisoner walked toward the bay. Straggling in the rear came Rickards, his eyes vacant of expression, his lips fluttering with unvoiced words.

The woods resounded to the cry of the Beaver but no more bird calls were heard. The strange procession had covered only a short distance when the soft scuffling of feet told the four men they had an invisible escort.

"Are my red brothers from Detroit afraid to show their faces? Black Beaver of the Senecas calls you," cried the Conestoga.

Almost immediately the four men found themselves surrounded by ferocious faces. The leader of the Indians jumped toward Meekly and drew back his knife.

"Hold!" shouted Ballou in the Huron tongue and then in French. "Let no man touch the prisoner of the Trade Knife. If my brothers want prisoners let them go and take them as the Knife has done."

And he raised his rifle under one arm.

"Let my brothers look on the medicine-face of the Ga-go-sa and keep their knives in their belts," warned the Beaver in the Seneca dialect. "He who takes a prisoner knows when that prisoner should die and how he should die."

"Sleeping Wolf saw only a white man who is alive," hissed the leader as he fell back and restored his knife to the girdle. "Where does the Trade Knife go? We have heard his name whispered by our fires many times. Who does he look for near the village of the Sandusky Wyandottes?"

"He goes to find canoes so he can paddle to Detroit where he would show his prisoner and talk to the Three Fires (Ottawas, Chippewas, and Potawatomis)."

"The Knife needs no canoe to end his travel. The Voice (Pontiac) of the Three Fires is in the Wyandotte village. His warriors camp around it. Who is this man with the medicine-face on his back?"

"He is Black Beaver of the Senecas. He has grown tired of guarding the Western Door and comes to help take Detroit," proudly retorted the Conestoga.

"Who is this white man who is very brave, or very blind?" harshly continued

Sleeping Wolf, his malignant gaze growing puzzled as he noted the peculiar bearing of Rickards.

"Before he talked with ghosts he was an Englishman. We found him walking in the woods, whispering to ghosts. When he enters the village of the Shawnees, or the Leni-lenape, the warriors do not stand in his path. When he goes to their kettles and takes out meat they do not see him. The False-faces say a very strong spirit has placed a hand on his head."

The savages drew back from Rickards and stared at him uneasily. But on Meekly they bent glances of terrible expectancy. Sleeping Wolf insisted:

'This man should be warmed at a fire very soon. His scalp should be in the smoke."

"It will need more medicine than the Wolf has to take his scalp," jeered Ballou; and he snatched off Meekly's fur hat. "Who can scalp a man like this? I take him to Pontiac. There is no hair to cut off close to the head. He may be washed in the river until his white blood is gone. He may be made into a red man and be a strong medicine for his red brothers. He may be burned. The Knife has not said.

The shiny poll of the forest-runner was something that, perhaps, none of the Indians had ever seen. The absence of hair in itself suggested a powerful medicine. Surely it was a mystery; and all mysteries are medicines. The red man's reasoning from effect back to cause left them only one explanation. The entire top of the prisoner's head had been scalped. He had not only survived the terrible hurt, but by some magic the wound had healed without leaving a scar.

"You shall stand in the light of the Three Fires," ominously promised Sleeping Wolf.

And surrounded by Wyandottes, by their brothers the northern Hurons, by Ottawas and Chippewas, Ballou drove his prisoner from the woods and across the marshland to the permanent Wyandotte village and Pontiac's war camp.

CHAPTER VII

THE VOICE OF THE THREE FIRES

PONTIAC'S camp was pitched between the permanent huts of the Wyandottes and the shore of the bay. From camp and village many warriors poured forth to meet Sleeping Wolf's band and the four strangers. The onrush of the Ottawas threatened to sweep the white men off their feet, and only the loud voice of Sleeping Wolf and the activity of his followers in forming a protective circle held the naked savages in check. More cruel and barbarous than any of their allies, although their intercourse with the Hurons had improved them somewhat, they were considerably below the average red plane. Denied the privilege of tearing the four men to pieces they danced and howled like demons.

Their bodies were painted and tattooed and their faces were hideously decorated, the favorite pattern being half red and half green, with white circles around the eyes. They had long since shamed their Huron friends by going naked in the warm season, and of all those now clamoring for the strangers' blood there were very few who boasted even of a breech-cloth. Their weapons were more crude than were those of the Hurons, Chippewas, and Potawatomi.

Those who carried trade-muskets possessed them because of Pontiac's enterprise in procuring firearms from certain New Orleans traders. All carried huge clubs, bows and arrows, while a few had shields made from boiled hides. There was an immense gulf between them and the Iroquois of the Long House and the Cherokees. They were entirely lacking in the historical background of the Delawares. They were inferior to the Shawnees in persistency of purpose. And yet it was from such a people that Pontiac had sprung.

"To the kettle! To the kettle!" howled one brawny fellow, whose wide chest was covered with a crude drawing of a turtle. "We will eat them up!"

Sleeping Wolf's Indians tightened their ring and the Wolf began a harangue which was smothered by howls and whoops. Rickards slipped through the guards and approaching the ringleader struck him a mighty blow on the chin and knocked him senseless. Many of the Ottawas yelled in delight at this display of courage; others stared wonderingly at the white man and whispered about him, saying that he was not as other men.

In the lull which followed this unexpected assault Sleeping Wolf managed to make himself heard, and he proclaimed:

"This white man talks with ghosts. The

hands of the Manitos have rested on his head. Let no man touch him."

Now that the rabid mob understood that Rickards had lost his mind there was not one, who, for any price, would have dared offer him violence. He was as safe with the Ottawas as he was with the Wyandottes. When the prostrate savage was able to crawl to his feet and understand his companions' low-voiced remarks he had no desire to resent the blow. But if Rickards were immune, the other white men, and even the Conestoga, were in dire peril. One Ottawa ducked between two Wyandotte guards and tried to snatch the wooden shield from Black Beaver's back. He promptly received a blow from the back of the Beaver's ax and retired with a broken wrist.

With the fury of starved wolves the others would have avenged this hurt. The Conestoga drew his knife so as to have both hands gripping a weapon, and challenged:

"Who among you mangy dogs will fight Black Beaver? Is a man of the Ga-go-sa, a man who has stood watch at the Western Door of the Long House, to allow dogs to bark at his heels when he walks through a village?"

A score or more would gladly have accepted this gage of battle on the spot had not a strong voice from the rear of the frenzied mob commanded:

"Let my children be very wise. Let them lift no red hatchet against the strangers. The Master of Life has sent them here. If their hearts are clean we will accept them as brothers. If their hearts are unclean the Master of Life will tell us when to boil them clean."

Pontiac had spoken, and the Ottawas ceased their shouting and threats of vengeance. The great war-chief strode away as if having no further interest in the scene. Behind him walked Ninivois and Take, the ablest of his lieutenants. The four men watched him once he drew clear of the massed savages and did not shift their gaze until after he had entered a hut on the edge of the village.

"The dogs!" muttered the Beaver as he replaced his weapons and stared defiantly at the sullen savages.

"The Seneca spits like a tree-cat," snarled Sleeping Wolf. "There are many here who will cut his claws if the great Pontiac gives the word."

"Ho, Ottawas, and you other men!" loudly shouted the Beaver. "Sleeping Wolf says there are some of you who will cut my claws if your chief nods his head. The Beaver says to that: Let many come together. Let no man come alone unless he wishes to take a long journey among the ghosts. The Beaver breaks bones with the back of his ax. He cuts off heads with the edge."

And he pulled out his ax and flourished it, then sent it spinning high in the air and deftly caught it by the handle, as a finishing touch to his boasting.

"Tell the fool to shut up," muttered Meekly to Ballou. "They'll murder us before we can reach our camping place if he keeps on."

But Ballou refused to caution the Indian. He knew the Beaver's bearing and insolent words had made a deep impression on the mixed band. A red man accepted one of his color at face-value until his worth was disproved. The warrior who would be proclaimed great must show no hesitancy in making his boasts and in throwing broadcast his challenges. That the spectators were viewing the Beaver with much respect was evidenced by their silence. Sleeping Wolf, too, began to admire his charge.

Rickards suddenly took the notion to wander away from his friends. Oblivious to the scowling glances, and seemingly intent on fastening a fragment of his shirt around his left arm he held a course toward the village. The scowls gave way to perplexity as the savages noted the arm was uninjured and that the white man never quite succeeded in making the bandage fast. All eyes watched him as he stooped and entered a hut. All eyes remained fixed on the low opening until he emerged, gnawing hungrily at a huge piece of meat.

It was Pontiac's hut he had entered, and a wide path was given him as he strolled back and walked beside his friends until they were brought to a halt beside a small fire.

"A child of the *manitos!*" muttered a Chippewa.

"He takes meat from the Three Fires," added a Potawatomi.

"He has seen the Great Hare in a dream," uneasily whispered an Ottawa.

"Shall one who talks with ghosts be afraid of an Ottawa, even of Pontiac?" derided Black Beaver.

No one answered him. Rickards sat down beside Ballou and greedily devoured the meat. When Ballou tied Meekly to a tree Rickards kept at his heels. Sleeping Wolf withdrew to report to Pontiac, but his men remained at some distance from the fire and in a circle around it. They smoked their pipes and pretended not to be interested in the men they were guarding, and yet their keen eyes noted every move the four men made.

Realizing the savages were on the alert Ballou simulated sudden anger and pretended to be buffeting Meekly on the side of the head with his clinched fist. And as he harmlessly belabored his friend he whispered:

"Looks bad. No one asked who I am since we entered the camp."

With a final cuff he bent as though to examine the prisoner's wrist bonds.

Meekly whispered:

"Wolf has gone to talk with Pontiac. They're puzzled. They're up a stump. Wolf will tell Pontiac you're the Trade Knife. They'll think you are the Knife. But remember and tell all the truth you can in 'splaining how we four come here together."

Ballou retired to the fire and directed Rickards to procure more wood. The unfortunate at once obeyed. Walking through the guards he penetrated among the groups of sullen savages until he came to a fire that was generously supplied with fuel. He pushed the owner aside and filled his arms and returned to Ballou. Nor did the savage display any objection at having his pile of chopped branches depleted, but stood to one side and averted his head so as not to encounter the medicine-man's eyes.

After delivering the wood Rickards stretched himself out and went to sleep. After an hour of dull waiting Sleeping Wolf strode up to the fire and addressing Ballou, said—

"The Frenchman called the Trade Knife would hear the voice of the Three Fires."

"The son of Tamaque, chief of the Unalachtigo band of the Leni-lenape would hear the voice," sharply corrected Ballou. "Let the Wolf remember the Knife's heart is as red as his. The Knife came to Sandusky on his way to find the voice and to listen."

"The voice is ready to speak. Sleeping Wolf leads the way," was the sullen answer.

Ballou arose and drew his weapons from his belt and tossed them beside his rifle for the Beaver to guard.

"Wish me luck," he muttered in English, and pausing to throw a bit of tobacco on the fire as if performing some ceremony of sacrifice.

"Heaps of luck," grunted Meekly.

"Be brave! Be cunning!" mumbled the Conestoga, and he held the wooden mask up to the fire.

SLEEPING WOLF backed away when he beheld the face leering at him. With head erect and walking briskly, but with his heart sinking, Ballou followed Sleeping Wolf to the over-chief's hut. As he came to a halt before the low entrance he discovered Rickards was at his heels, and was again busy examining his bare arm.

All but the circle of guards were now slowly making toward the immediate vicinity of the hut. But if they expected their chief to appear and in public examine into the white man's credentials they were to be disappointed. Never a more cunning Indian leader lived than Pontiac the Ottawa. He thoroughly understood dramatic values. He fully realized the advantage of setting his stage before appearing upon it. When he spoke in open council he must be familiar with the matter under consideration and be prepared to give an immediate decision. His savage followers believed he spoke as one inspired by the Master of Life. Shrewd decisions seemed to be framed on the spur of the moment. To such practises did Pontiac owe his reputation of being under the guidance of the *manitos*.

The warriors gathered at a respectful distance from the cabin would believe their leader arrived at his conclusions when he called his chiefs and leading men around him and invited all his followers to listen to his oratory.

In this, as in all other matters, the over-chief would thoroughly inform himself as to the nature of the problem before taking up the details in public. Ballou supposed he was being called before the chief as a preliminary form; whereas his fate and that of his friends would be fixed before he left the hut.

"Enter, Frenchman!" called out Pontiac's strong voice.

"There is no Frenchman here," coldly replied Ballou. "The son of Tamaque, called the Trade Knife, is here."

"Let the Trade Knife enter," Pontiac invited.

As Ballou passed through the doorway Pontiac sharply inquired—

"Who is the other white man?"

And he stirred uneasily on the robe on which he was half reclining.

"It is the man who struck Big Turtle to the ground," informed Sleeping Wolf, who had, according to his orders, followed the white man inside the hut. "The *manitos* have rested hands on his head. The man who took meat from Pontiac's kettle."

The hut was lighted by one small hole and the open door. Pontiac was reclining with his back to the wall and somewhat in the shadows; yet there was enough light to betray an uneasiness in his eyes as he looked at the hulking figure of Rickards. Possessing an intellect far superior to that of any of his associates he nevertheless remained a red man; and even to capture Detroit he would scarcely give offense to Rickards.

Ballou knew the chief would prefer that the demented man leave the hut, and he directed him—

"Go and get wood for our fire."

Rickards paused only long enough to fish another chunk of meat from the kettle and went out.

Sleeping Wolf spread a robe where the light from the hole would fall upon it and motioned for Ballou to be seated. Pontiac stared for half a minute at the painted face and then lighted a long-stemmed pipe. After a few ceremonial puffs he passed it to the Wolf who handed it to the white man. After Ballou had smoked and returned the pipe the chief said—

"They say you are Tamaque's son and are called the Trade Knife."

"They speak with straight tongues," was the quiet reply.

Pontiac watched him thoughtfully for a full minute, and then remarked—

"They say the Trade Knife never leaves his red father's side."

"They say a lie. I am Tamaque's son. I am here. Tamaque is not here."

Another pause, then Pontiac was observing:

"Tamaque is lame. Or he is a prisoner?"

"He walked strong and was at the head of a big war band when I left him."

"There was a war-belt sent him by Pontiac. It was red and purple," mused the chief.

"The great Pontiac is tired and needs sleep. He forgets. He will think straight after he has slept. The belt was white and black with many French marks upon it. It was used by the French in the Braddock war," corrected Ballou.

Without any change of countenance the chief's sonorous voice replied:

"Pontiac has sent and received so many war-belts that only a Keeper of the Wampum can remember them all. Our son speaks with a straight tongue. Tamaque's belt was white and black. Has the belt gone on a journey?"

"The Loon and the Tall Tree have taken it to the Western Door."

With a flash of anger the chief demanded—

"Why to the Western Door when the Senecas already are in the war?"

"Ask Tamaque, chief of the Unalachtigo. Perhaps he would say the belt must pass through the Western Door before it can be received by the Cayugas at Gayagaanhe, or at the Great Oneida Village, or at Onondaga, where the council fire never dies out."

Pontiac toyed with a string of purple-and-white wampum which he was wearing around his neck, and prompted him:

"The Trade Knife needs sleep. He forgets Canajoharie, the upper Mohawk village."

"The mighty Pontiac knows the belt would be thrown into the fire if it went to Sir William Johnson's Mohawks."

"The Mohawks cling very tight to the hand of the Saganash (English). But let them keep a good watch of their villages after Detroit has fallen. The red hatchet will not be too tired to travel even to the Mohawk country. Who is the white man tied to the tree?"

"Saganash. I caught him in the woods. He is my prisoner," explained Ballou, speaking calmly but with a sudden palpitation of the heart.

"Men have talked about the Trade Knife at our northern fires. He does well to bring his prisoner here. My warriors are cold. They will warm themselves at his fire."

"He is the prisoner of Tamaque's son," slowly reminded Ballou. "The Trade Knife knows when it is good to burn his prisoner. If the Ottawas be cold let them find a white man and burn him. The Saganash belongs to the Knife."

Pontiac hitched up on one elbow, his

eyes half closing, yet his voice was pleasant as he asked—

"Would the son of my friend refuse the father of the Three Fires a little fire to warm the hands of his warriors?"

"Tamaque would frown if his son's prisoner was burned by the Ottawas. The Leni-lenape have cold hands and feet. They must not come and find the Saganash has been burned to warm the Ottawas, the Chippewas, and the Potawatomi."

Pontiac warmly approved.

"Our friend's son talks well. It would have been good if Tamaque had sent him with the belt through the Western Door to talk to the Cayugas, the Oneidas, and the Onondagas. It is true that a man's prisoner is his own. The Master of Life has said it. It is good."

For several minutes no word was spoken; then Pontiac reached the next point in his examination.

"They say a brave man from the Senecas came here with you. Why is he not fighting with his brothers at Fort Pitt? There are few Senecas at Detroit, although there is room for many. They are very brave men."

"Black Beaver left Tamaque's band to come with me. He brings the Ga-go-sa medicine which helps him turn himself into a snake."

Pontiac was very sceptical of the last statement, but he was sincere in gravely saying:

"It is good. I have waited many moons for the Senecas to help me take Detroit."

"He can teach his medicine to others. He believes many will wish to have the False-faces for friends."

"Pontiac will join the Ga-go-sa. Perhaps the Ottawas who now listen to the black-robes will join it."

This prospect of utilizing a borrowed Iroquois medicine for drawing fresh recruits to him lighted new fires in the chief's eyes. He was still scheming to profit by the influence of the wooden mask when Rickards blundered through the door. The man walked to the end of the cabin and back without seeming to see either of the three occupants. Pontiac eyed him narrowly. Sleeping Wolf hugged his blanket closer and bowed his head to avoid beholding the stupid face.

Once more Ballou softly commanded—

"Go and get more wood."

Rickards stumbled to the door, then paused and tugged at his long hair as if striving to remember something. Ballou was astounded to hear him mutter:

"White face. Yaller hair. Wants to go home."

Then he was gone.

By a mighty effort Ballou maintained his composure and informed the chief:

"He talks with the *manitos*. They have told him about a white woman with yellow hair—a woman Tamaque captured down on the Forbes road."

He waited, hoping the chief would give him some clue.

"He has been with Tamaque's warriors, they say. He saw the white woman," said Pontiac.

Ballou showed no interest although consumed with a desire to be after Rickards and to learn what had prompted his reference to Nell Marks. Very likely Rickards had seen the girl often while trailing Tamaque's band north to the Susquehanna. But it was maddening to know that if the cloud could be lifted from the benumbed mind there would remain no uncertainty as to where the girl was being held a prisoner. Pontiac disappointed him by making no further reference to the girl. Instead he switched the talk by remarking:

"There is a Frenchman who has often eaten in my wigwam on Isle à la Pêche in Lake St. Clair. He has lived with the red men since a little boy. He is very cunning and is called the Rat."

He paused as if expecting Ballou to say something. Scenting danger, and yet unable to comprehend of what it consisted, Ballou lighted his pipe and nodded, and in French murmured:

"To be sure. The Rat. A very cunning man. His heart is all red."

"He has spoken of the Trade Knife; and on Winter nights he has told us how he and the Knife crossed the Ohio and hunted in the Kentucky country and fought with the Cherokees."

Ballou's nerves were tingling. He felt as if surrounded by traps.

"It was good hunting in the Kentucky country. And good fighting," he declared.

Sleeping Wolf, who had leaned forward to watch the immobile face of the white man, sank back against the wall. Ballou asked himself:

"What the —— is up now! The Rat is worse than the Knife, if that be possible.

But why bring his name in? What trick is the old —— trying to play? Prove I never saw the Rat? Then he must fetch him here and bring us face to face."

There were but few border men who had not heard of The Rat's ferocious habits. He had taught his foster-brothers more than one trick in fiendish cruelty. Better for a prisoner to fall into the hands of the Ottawas than to be turned over to the Rat. Ballou was anxious to get back to the fire and seek counsel from Meekly, who knew the frontiers as a scholar knows his books. He appeared to be thoroughly satisfied with lounging on the robe and smoking his pipe.

"The Rat has sent a bag of talk to the Three Fires. He will help take Detroit and bring many Fox warriors from the Fox River," commented Pontiac.

Ballou nodded indolently, and tried to still the loud thumping of his heart. The Hill of the Dead was on the Fox.

"But the Rat is very cunning and makes a trade. He wants a white woman, Saganash. He is tired of French women."

"He is a foolish man. A cunning man would take a woman and trade for rum or new guns," jeered Ballou.

"Pontiac has said the same. It is good. But the Rat can bring many Foxes. The Rat shall have his price."

"Tamaque told his son something the same," murmured Ballou. "The Knife's ears were only half open. The talk was foolish. That is why Tamaque sent the white woman north."

"The Rat may make foolish talk, but the Knife's father is very wise," harshly informed Pontiac. "Tamaque trades but Pontiac must pay the new guns that buys the white woman."

"Tamaque will soon come to get the guns," Ballou compelled his lips to say.

"Pontiac will offer a trade to Tamaque that will pay him better than the new guns."

Ballou smoked on, refraining from showing any curiosity. Pontiac sniffed several times and remarked:

"The Trade Knife does not like our *kinnikinick*. There is a white taste in his mouth even if his heart is red."

Ballou once more realized the danger of the game he was playing. And he knew he had erred in filling his pipe with the strong trade-tobacco that seldom suited the palate of the red man, or of a white man turned red and long used to tobacco adulterated with barks, leaves or roots. With a grimace he explained:

"It is a war-tobacco I took from the prisoner. He is a very brave man. He will die very brave. The medicine of Black Beaver, the Seneca, said it would make my heart strong to smoke it."

With a flash of anger Pontiac hissed:

"The Seneca's medicine makes a strange talk. The Master of Life has told the Lenilenape, who told the Three Fires, that we must destroy all white things before the red man can have all things. White tobacco for white men. Red tobacco for red men. The Iroquois will not smoke trade-tobacco in any of their ceremonies; nothing but *kinnikinick*—the very name meaning, 'which is mixed by hand.' "

Continuing to smoke Ballou argued:

"We use guns taken from white men. We use their blankets and eat their food. They say the Ottawas sometimes eat white men. White tobacco is too strong. It bites the tongue. Yet the Knife will smoke it to make his heart strong. When the Knife catches a white man his weapons and tobacco are no longer white. All are red."

Pontiac pondered over this doctrine for several minutes, weighing the advisability of giving it out as being his own thought should a time come when he must hold his men together with promises of much looting. He gravely admitted:

"What the Knife says may be true. It sounds a good talk. When I next talk with the Master of Life in my dreams he will tell me."

He rose and threw a blanket over his shoulders and abruptly announced:

"There are dead men waiting to be covered. The Trade Knife will look at them."

He slipped an ax into his girdle and stalked to the door.

BALLOU sprang to his feet and wondered what tragic surprize was awaiting him. So far as he could recall their conversation it consisted of odds and ends, as if there were a variety of subjects Pontiac had planned on touching without exhausting. The monstrous statement that the white girl had been bought by the Rat, without the all-necessary information as to her whereabouts, was most maddening. The intimation that Tamaque might be coming at any moment to receive his new guns was alarming. The reference to

the Rat seemed to have no point. Why should the Rat's bargain, struck with Pontiac, be repeated to an adopted son of Tamaque, who would be knowing all the details of the deal?

The interview left him bewildered and deeply agitated. For a moment he believed the reference to dead men meant his friends, Meekly and the Beaver, but second thought told him this could not be. Meekly was the only one of the four whose status was that of an enemy. And even Pontiac would scarcely care to kill a man captured by the son of Tamaque and chief of the Turkey band of the Leni-lenape. Yet Ballou did not breathe freely until standing in the doorway and glimpsing Rickards, Meekly and the Beaver.

Pontiac had noted his swift glance, and he likewise stared at the three figures.

"One Seneca comes after a long time," he remarked. "When Pontiac spoke for the Three Fires and sent many belts, so that the dogs dressed in red might be driven back to Montreal and the Mohawk country, the Senecas were like young boys, hungry for their first war-path. They could not wait. They stuck axes in Saganash heads before the Three Fires were ready. Now they wait a very long time. Had they answered my belts by coming to Detroit there would be no fort there now, and Pontiac would now be down on the Monongahela, and doing what he did when Braddock was killed."

"Black Beaver's medicine has told the Senecas they must hunt like hungry wolves in Winter—in one pack. They must follow Pontiac against Detroit, or he must lead them against Fort Pitt."

Pontiac's chest expanded and his eyes flashed proudly. If Ballou had feared the great chief was suspicious of him, he now ceased to be afraid on that point.

"Good!" loudly approved Pontiac. "The Seneca's medicine is mighty and very wise. The Master of Life speaks through it. Let Tamaque open his ears to the medicine and follow me to Detroit and very soon we will travel south with him and take Fort Pitt. When we leave Detroit to take Fort Pitt there will remain only Niagara west of Montreal. With Pitt burned, Niagara will next be cut off and wiped out. The Senecas will fight very hard against Niagara as it is on their land. Then let the Saganash take their women and children away from Montreal, for no living man, except he be French, shall show a head outside the town without feeling the ax."

He remained staring toward the north, his face that of one who sees visions. This was the trade he would offer to Tamaque, which would pay the Delaware chief "better than the new guns." Ballou was confident he had discovered the major purpose of Pontiac's visit to Sandusky Bay. To buy a white woman for the Rat and thereby secure reenforcements from the western Foxes was well worth while for a leader who could not increase his fighting force to more than a thousand men. But given all the Sacs and Fox tribes at his heels and yet he could not conquer and rule over a vast inland empire so long as the Ohio Indians warred apart from his leadership. But let the red forces unite and be handled as a unit, as the Long House had handled its men in conquering half of the continent, Pontiac's ambition to be over-chief of many tribes might come near to being realized.

Had such a close confederacy been formed early in the season before the Spring boats brought supplies and reenforcements down the lakes, Detroit would have fallen, then Pitt; and by mid-Summer Pontiac's hordes would have swept the entire frontier and for years would have penned in the white men behind the Alleghanies.

As Ballou watched the austere visage he saw the wild enthusiasm die from the stern eyes. Already Pontiac realized that his hold on the northern Indians was slipping. Viewing it from the start as a "Beaver war," with plunder the prize most desired, the Three Fires had nothing to show for their hardships and losses except the capture of a few small posts weakly garrisoned. No onward sweeping tide of immigration had swallowed up their hunting-grounds as yet, so they knew none of the fears which were actuating the Ohio tribes.

Already it had become a great problem to feed the warriors beleaguring Detroit. The French settlers, friendly to Pontiac and his ambitions at the start, were sorely vexed by the constant demands for beeves and grain. Subordinate chiefs were impatient to abandon the siege and lead their men to the hunting-grounds. Although over-chief of more than four thousand warriors—more men than the Iroquois employed in the heyday of their conquests—Pontiac has been unable to gather about him at any time more than a thousand men.

The far northern Ottawas had been held neutral through the influence of their priest. Closely allied to the Three Fires were the Menominees, the Winnebagoes, the Sacs and Foxes, dwelling in the country west of Lake Michigan and numbering twelve hundred fighting men. None of these tribes had contributed any aid to Pontiac except as the Sacs, seeking plunder, joined with the Chippewas in reducing Fort Michilimackinac, second to Detroit in importance on the lakes. The most valuable service rendered the war-chief was performed by the two hundred and fifty Wyandottes from the Detroit River. In courage they easily equalled any of the confederated tribes and excelled them in intelligence.

The Sandusky Wyandottes were closely allied to the Delawares and Shawnees, and while assisting Pontiac at times their full strength was never concentrated on any one objective. The swarthy leader had been sure of success at the outset; now he doubted, and to abandon his proud scheme was a worse torture than any fire-encircled stake could inflict upon him. He had come to Sandusky Bay in a last desperate effort to augment his forces. And he had brought with him the fear that the Wyandottes, Potawatomis, and Chippewas were secretly planning to make a separate peace with Major Gladwin.

As one awakening from a dream Pontiac impatiently shook his head and said—

"We will go and look on the dead men and cover their bones with white scalps."

Rickards beheld Ballou walking behind the chief and eagerly made after him, taking no heed of the groups of warriors in his path and unconscious of their ludicrous haste in scrambling out of his way. He overtook his protector as Pontiac was picking his way through the huts of the Wyandottes. Pontiac heard the heavy steps and turned and thoughtfully scanned the vacuous face. Then he asked Ballou—

"Can the child of the *manitos* tell us when Tamaque will come?"

With a little shiver of fear running up and down his spine Ballou darted an anxious glance toward the bay, where Tamaque's fleet of canoes and the genuine Trade Knife might appear at any time. He replied:

"Tamaque sent his son to say he would come in a few sleeps. He went to the Great Island village in the Susquehanna to make new war-medicine. Black Beaver and the Knife left him there to bring his talk to the Three Fires."

As this did not answer the chief's question he persisted:

"The child of the *manitos* will listen to the voice of the Knife. Let Tamaque's son ask him what his medicine eyes see."

Ballou, perforce, turned to Rickards and touched his arm and asked—

"Any new folks crowding in on us, Rickards?"

Without seeming to hear the question Rickards said in a sing-song voice:

"Face white like white clay. Yaller hair."

Ballou opened his mouth to put an eager question, but Pontiac said:

"He talks of a white woman. Ask him to send his eyes down the lake."

"Rickards, are any more Injuns crowding in on us?" demanded Ballou.

"White face. Yaller hair," mumbled Rickards.

"His medicine will not answer," Ballou told the chief. "Perhaps the Falseface of the Seneca will."

Rickards startled both of them by exclaiming:

"Too many canoes. Too many Injuns."

Pontiac did not need an interpreter, and his black eyes were turned toward the lake as though he expected to behold the sudden appearance of the Delawares. But no flotilla of canoes broke the eastern rim of the lake.

"His hand is in the hand of a *manito!*" piously exclaimed Pontiac. It will be a good talk to give my warriors."

Then to Sleeping Wolf, who followed a few paces in the rear, he said:

"Let no man touch this man who was Saganash, but who now belongs to the *manitos*. Even though he strike and kill, let no man touch him. Pontiac has said it."

As if talking his dictum into a belt he removed the string of wampum from his neck and placed it around the neck of Rickards, thus conferring upon the half-wit an absolute freedom of movement and complete immunity from any overt acts he might indulge in. Rickards examined the wampum and was pleased with the color combination and patted and caressed it; all of which pleased the chief greatly.

"The *manitos* will speak to me many

times with his voice," said Pontiac as he resumed his way among the huts. The Wyandotte village, formerly clean and comfortable, now presented a filthy appearance because of the owners' absence much of the time, and the passing of transient occupants. Pontiac halted before a long structure that had served as a council house:

"The dead men wait in here," he announced, and, bowing his head, passed through the low opening.

RICKARDS crowded upon Ballou's heels and entered, with Sleeping Wolf coming last. Two canoes were arranged on the left and right hand side of the room. In each reposed an Indian, and each Indian had been scalped. As Ballou stood beside the chief and saw the wisps of swamp grass adhering to the dried mud on their limbs and bodies he began to understand and fought desperately to conceal any show of emotion.

"They are painted black for war. Where did they fight?" Ballou asked after a minute of silence.

"Who knows, if the *manito* child can not tell us," mournfully replied Pontiac. "They were found dead and scalped near the Cuyahoga River. They had been thrown into a swamp."

"Their bones must be covered with many Saganash scalps," Ballou fiercely declared.

Pontiac intended the dead should thus be covered, and yet he was disturbed.

"The Trade Knife remembers them?" he asked.

Again Ballou feared a trap. He stared more closely at the nearest warrior. Where the charcoal had been washed from the chest he discerned the faint outline of a turkey's foot.

"They are of the Unalachtigo band of the Leni-lenape," he boldly asserted. He knew it would be better to guess this much wrong and be corrected than to deny acquaintance and then be shown they were Tamaque's people with whom the Knife had dwelt for years.

"The eyes of the Knife are very sharp. They are the four men who brought the white woman to Pontiac. They started back with a band of my Ottawas to say to Tamaque that fifty new guns were waiting for him here at Sandusky."

"Tamaque does not know they have been here. Pontiac's Ottawas should have sent some of their young men to tell Tamaque."

"It is very bad they were killed," gloomily admitted Pontiac. "Evil birds may whisper to Tamaque that my children let them be killed."

"Evil birds may whisper Pontiac's warriors killed them," suggested Ballou.

The chief winced at this possibility, and his voice was hoarse as he replied:

"It would be better if four of my Ottawas filled these canoes. My children were afraid to take them on to Presqu' Isle. They had no medicine to tell them they must send their swiftest canoe to Tamaque to tell him his men were dead."

"And what will they tell my red father when he comes to Sandusky?" asked Ballou.

Again Pontiac was disconcerted.

"It is very bad, but they can tell but little. My children and these men put in at the Cuyahoga River and found a new campfire and a canoe. Tamaque's sons would take back scalps to their father. They painted black and hunted for a trail. My children heard no guns, no sound of fighting. They waited a long time, then took to the woods and came to where men had fought at the swamp. They found where these men had been dragged to the swamp and thrown in with their guns and axes. They were struck down from ambush before they could use their guns."

"Evil birds may whisper to Tamaque that only red men could take them by surprize," said Ballou. "But the Knife will tell Tamaque the Ottawas did not do it."

"That is good talk," said Pontiac. "But it is very bad our medicine can not tell who killed them. My brother, Tamaque, will want to know how his children were killed. Pontiac believes white men did it. Then white men must be between the Cuyahoga and Sandusky. There are two men who can tell the truth."

He paused and Ballou waited with great fear in his heart, and at last prompted him—

"The men have names?"

"Let the child of the *manitos* look at them and ask his medicine to tell us," was Pontiac's reply.

Dreading lest Rickards might recall enough of the fight at the swamp to divulge the truth, Ballou gritted his teeth and nerved himself for the test. Rickards had halted inside the door and had not

approached the canoes. His gaze was wandering aimlessly about the long room, his lower jaw sagging stupidly.

"His medicine will not talk unless he stand by my side and Pontiac and the Wolf stand back. The *manitos* do not like too many ears when they whisper to their child," announced Ballou.

Pontiac unwillingly retired and stood beside Sleeping Wolf.

"Come here, Rickards," Ballou called in English.

Rickards promptly obeyed, his gaze roaming idly. He halted at Ballou's side and stared at the wall and its line of wooden pegs. Ballou jerked his arm and directed—

"Look down in the canoe."

Rickards slowly deflected his gaze. His dull eyes grew round and were filled with terror. Pontiac's deep voice called out—

"Ask him who killed the Leni-lenape."

"The fight! The rock!" suddenly cried Rickards and pointing to the man whose skull he had crushed.

"And the snake!" hissed Ballou under his breath.

With a bubbling cry Rickards jumped back and clutched at his left arm. Then he began his long-drawn-out yell, pitched low and sobbing at first, but rapidly rising to a thin scream. With the sweat running down his painted face Ballou led him to the door and pushed him out into the sunlight. Pontiac and Sleeping Wolf hastily drew to one side so he would not brush against them, and neither of the red men could conceal his uneasiness.

"You heard?" hoarsely cried Ballou. "He said there was a fight."

"And a rock!" exclaimed Pontiac; and he glided to the canoe.

In a loud voice he announced:

"His medicine is very strong. The *manitos* speak with straight tongues. My warriors said this man was killed with a war-club. He was killed by a heavy rock thrown against his head. There was an ambush. After a sleep the child of the *manitos* will tell us who threw the rock, and who stood beside that man and helped kill these warriors."

"Pontiac said there were two men who knew the truth," reminded Ballou, determined to learn the worst.

Pontiac tilted his head to listen as Rickards's weird cries softened down. Ignoring Ballou he stepped outside and hurried through the huts to the edge of the camp. Then he halted to gaze on a strange scene. Heedless of the gaping warriors Black Beaver was holding his wooden mask close to Rickards's face, and already the deranged man was forgetting his terror. He released his grasp on his left arm and relaxed his rigid pose. Black Beaver began walking backward to his fire and Rickards slowly followed him, his face heavy and stupid. A grunt, expressive of great awe, arose from the staring savages. Sleeping Wolf muttered:

"The Seneca medicine is very strong. It stopped the voice of the *manito*."

"The False-face can not stop the Master of Life when he would talk," muttered Pontiac, uneasy of mind as he beheld what to him was a miracle.

"An evil spirit tried to steal the white man's voice. The *manitos* told the Seneca to use the False-face and drive it away," explained Ballou.

This explanation was very acceptable to the chief and his subordinate. Pontiac breathed in relief and commanded:

"Our scouts shall go far into the woods and down the shore of the lake and look for signs. Let Sleeping Wolf start them off at once. Let the Trade Knife go to his fire and see that his prisoner does not escape."

"There are two men who know the truth," doggedly persisted Ballou. "Has the second man a name?"

"The white prisoner was one of the band that killed Tamaque's men. If the child of the *manitos* does not tell us who was in that band then the prisoner must speak up when Tamaque comes. My Ottawas shall not be named as the killers when a little fire will make the white man talk," sternly replied Pontiac.

"A great chief has spoken wise words," said Ballou.

With fear for Meekly's safety assailing his heart, and with his mind in a stew of worries, he walked back to the fire and seated himself with his back to his friend and filled his pipe. As he carefully stuffed in the tobacco he softly explained:

"The four men killed at the swamp are up there in a hut. They were the men who took Nell Marks to Pontiac. Pontiac believes you were of those who killed them. He tried to get the truth from Rickards, and I had to scare the poor devil by

whispering, 'snake,' for he was beginning to remember. Pontiac is waiting here for Tamaque to come. If Rickards can't tell what the chief wants to know he swears he will roast you and make you tell. He is afraid Tamaque will blame the Ottawas who went to Cuyahoga River with the four Delawares. I must cut you loose before Tamaque and the Trade Knife gets here."

Meekly bowed his head on his knees and replied:

"When the four Delawares fail to show up Tamaque will keep on waiting for 'em. They may help us a lot by being dead."

"Pontiac bought Nell Marks for fifty new guns. He will trade her to that ——'s spawn, the Rat, the worst half-breed in the Indian camps. The Rat has promised many Fox Indians if the girl is turned over to him."

"Oh, lawdy! That's poor hearing," mumbled Meekly. "Where is the girl now?"

"I couldn't ask outright as I am supposed to know all about it, being the Trade Knife. But Rickards spoke of her several times. Enoch, I believe she is near here. We must all get away tonight."

"No. We can help her most by making believe a bit longer. Rickards can go anywhere and his wits are mending. They don't look cross-eyed at you or the Beaver. In another day you three oughter find where she's being held for the Rat."

"We'll stay. You shall escape."

"And make Pontiac git suspicious? I'll stick a bit longer. We're safe till old Tamaque comes."

"But Pontiac is now starting scouts to follow the shore line toward the Cuyahoga. He believes white men are near here. Some of his scouts must find our trail," added Ballou.

"That makes it more binding," mumbled Meekly. "They'll find some of our signs. But if they start now they won't be back for another day at the least. We come for the gal. We won't skin out to save our own hides. If I go they'll suspect you others. They'll watch every move you make. You'll be prisoners, and then Tamaque and the real Knife will come. No. Can't be did. I'll wait on a bit. Things always mend if you give 'em time."

"I'm nearly as crazy as poor Rickards," groaned Ballou, bending over his pipe. "Rickards babbles about a 'white face' and 'yellow hair.' ——! To think, Enoch, she may be hidden away right in this very camp, or village!"

Meekly was silent for a minute, and then sought to comfort his friend by assuring him: "It'll be more'n a day before the scouts come back. Tomorrer you can nose 'round and talk to Rickards. Best way is to follow him. He must have seen something that made him think of her, or else his wits are clearing up enough for him to remember seeing her in Tamaque's camp before she was sent up this way. But there's one danger p'int I'm most mortally skeered of."

"Is it possible there's something I haven't worried my heart out about?" sighed Ballou.

"Something soon mended. Black Beaver has them four hanks of Delaware hair dried on painted hoops and wrapped up in his blanket. If they should be found——"

"Good ——! I never thought of that!" whispered Ballou.

He shifted his gaze to glance at the Conestoga and Rickards. The Beaver had slung his mask on his back and Rickards was stretched out and seemed to be very sleepy.

ALTHOUGH the savages had withdrawn more than a hundred feet from the fire when Rickards came screaming from the village their sharp gaze followed every move made by the four men, and Ballou did not attempt to speak with the Beaver and warn him of the new danger. A tall warrior brought a big kettle filled with boiled meat and dropped it on the ground. Then he said to the Conestoga:

"Let the Seneca get a squaw to bring him meat after this sleep. The Ottawas are not squaws."

"The Ottawas were traders and carried sunflower-oil and corn-meal, and mats and skins from tribe to tribe until a Pontiac came to show them how to fight," contemptuously retorted the Beaver. "The Ottawas go naked like animals. Some time they will have tails grow out and hang down and they will walk on four legs. Let the Ottawa man stop bringing meat to a great warrior and go with his women to the huckleberry-drying place. If he carries an ax he will fall down and cut himself."

With a snarl of rage at these insults, all the more bitter because of the old status of

the Ottawas as intertribal traders and dependent in famine time upon dried berries for food, the savage whipped out his knife and crouched for a spring. The Conestoga stood erect, with arms folded, staring most insolently at the infuriated brave. Ballou feared a new dilemma was about to be precipitated and yet dared not affront the pride of the Beaver by interfering. It was Rickards who prevented the fight. Aroused by the high words he rose and rubbed his eyes, and then beheld the Ottawa bending his powerful legs and making ready to hurl himself upon the Conestoga.

Somewhere in his hazy brain was a vague recollection of another and a similar scene, when an Indian was about to attack one of his friends. There was no rock at hand this time, however. Without any appearance of haste he picked up a stick of firewood and cracked the savage over the head.

A roar of rage rose from the onlookers, and hands clutched at weapons. Sleeping Wolf, from the outskirts of the enraged spectators shouted:

"Let no man touch the child of the *manitos* even if he strikes and kills. These are the words of Pontiac."

The howling died down and those braves who had started to their feet dropped back to the ground again. Rickards stared vacantly at the billet and then tossed it in the fire. The Beaver seated himself with his back to the bringer of meat. Ballou stepped forward and dragged the dazed warrior clear of the camping circle and then returned to his friends. Sleeping Wolf strode wrathfully up to the fire and hissed:

"How is this? Did the Knife tell the child of the *manitos* to knock an Ottawa in the head?"

Ballou affected great indifference and quietly advised him:

"Send a warrior next time, not a boy. He drew his knife to kill the Beaver, who stood with empty hands. The Knife heard the Wolf speak Pontiac's words to the Ottawas and their friends. Does the Wolf come to punish the *manitos's* child for hitting the meat-bringer on the head? Or would he punish the Seneca because he stood with his arms folded, his hands empty?"

Nonplused, and not daring to carry the matter further, Sleeping Wolf wheeled upon the Ottawa and upbraided him for trying to quarrel with the strangers. The Ottawa, thoroughly subdued and completely at loss to account for his being on the ground and at some distance from the fire, hurried away without a word. He was followed by the jeers of those who a few moments before had been hurling threats against the strangers. Sleeping Wolf next addressed the various groups of braves and advised them to withdraw to a greater distance as their presence seemed to excite the white medicine-man. He added:

"Let all know that the great Pontiac says no hand must touch that man," and he pointed to Rickards, "no matter if he strikes and kills. It is not good to keep too near one who talks with spirits."

As he walked away toward Pontiac's hut a general withdrawal of the Indians immediately followed.

For the first time since entering the camp the four friends were afforded some privacy. Ballou gave Rickards and the Beaver a platter of meat and served himself a portion, and then proceeded to instruct the Beaver:

"The Delaware scalps must be hidden where no man can find them. Pontiac sends out scouts. If they find our trail and Pontiac believes we killed the men at the swamp and the scalps be found in a blanket, it would be death at the stake for all but the man who talks with ghosts. The Beaver must hide the scalps."

"Tonight. When the camp sleeps. The scalps shall be put away," was the prompt promise.

"You can dig a hole and bury them. It would not be good to burn them. The Ottawas have noses like wolves."

"The hair of the Unalachtigo is the hair of brave men. They came to find and fight us while the Ottawas stayed on the river. There is good medicine in their hair. It shall help us. The hair shall not be burned, nor buried in the ground."

Endeavor as he would Ballou could not get an inkling of the Beaver's plan, although he knew a plan had been fully decided upon. After the three had eaten, Meekly's hands were unfastened and he was served. Ballou explained how the Beaver was up to some trick but was too stubborn to divulge it.

"That's the Injun in him," mumbled Meekly between mouthfuls. "Don't waste your breath trying to find out. I've been thinking it might be good medicine to drop

a scalp in each canoe if it could be done without any one knowing about it. But Pontiac is too sharp to be fooled beyond a certain p'int. Then again, the Beaver has dried and painted the scalps, and no Injuns with brains would believe a *manito* would go to that bother. Let him alone and wish for luck. That's all any of us can do. After them vermin git to sleep sort of loosen the rawhide 'round my neck. You'll have to take turns with the Beaver in standing guard over me. But there's no need of my missing my rest even if I be a prisoner."

As no liquor was given out that night the Indians took their rest early. Ballou stood the first watch, taking care occasionally to replenish the fire so as to reveal his bowed form to any wakeful savage. At midnight he went to arouse the sleeping Conestoga and was amazed to find his red friend had vanished. Several fagots of wood were under the blanket, giving it the appearance of a muffled form. Greatly alarmed and having no idea as to where the Indian had gone, or as to when he would return, Ballou threw his blanket over his head and returned to the fire, only now he allowed the flames to die down to coals. The Beaver absent meant the Beaver must return, and it was important that his absence should not be discovered.

An hour passed and Ballou was beside himself with worry. Another hour dragged away and he stepped to Meekly's side, thinking to awaken him and inform him of the Indian's disappearance. But his friend could afford him no enlightenment, and he stole softly back to his position by the bed of coals. Some time after midnight he lifted his head and stared toward the woods. The morning was coming and already it was possible to detect motion several hundred feet away. Here and there blinked the eye of a fire. He could even make out mound-like forms where the Ottawas slept in their robes. On the side toward the bay a thick mist stopped the vision.

Ballou began to ask himself what he should do if the Beaver failed to return and Pontiac put some very embarrassing questions. He did not attempt to guess what might be the Beaver's plan. No white man, let him live ever so long with the red man, could read the Indian mind. He fastened his gaze on the silent forest, hoping and fearing to behold the advance of a stealthy figure. A slight noise on the lake side of the camp brought his head around with a snap. The mist persisted in defying his gaze.

He resumed his watching of the forest, thinking the small alarm had been a marsh rat bent on foraging around the meat kettles. A soft hissing noise attracted his attention to the Beaver's blanket. A form was reclining there. Throwing some small branches on the coals Ballou arose and advanced to investigate. The Beaver was lying on the outside of his blanket and breathing heavily. As the fire caught the branches and faintly illumined the circle Ballou observed the man was naked and that his body glistened with water.

As the light increased the Beaver squirmed beneath the blanket and pushed out the fagots.

"You've been in the bay," whispered Ballou.

"In the bay and in the lake."

"I was badly frightened to find you gone. You could have tied a stone to the scalps and dropped them into the bay."

"The Leni-lenape hair is not wet. It has not touched water. They were put where their medicine can work for us."

Drawing his blanket over his head he fell asleep, leaving Ballou to complete the long watch and to wonder what it all meant.

TO BE CONTINUED.

FLYING CANNON

by Thomson Burtis

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THE enlisted men of the 114th Squadron were grouped in front of one of the big, corrugated-iron hangars which skirted the southern rim of Langham Field. Out on the line the Martins, Handley Pages and Capronis of the squadron were lined up. They were the ships which would carry with them the hopes of the Air Service, for by means of them and the bombs they could carry, the airmen hoped to prove themselves the country's most potentially powerful defense when, in a few days, they pitted their power against the most modern and powerful of battleships.

The climax of experiments—some of them near by on Chesapeake Bay—to determine the relative power of Air Service and battleships was only a few days away.

Captain Lawton's head became visible a foot above every one else as the lanky young commanding officer of the 114th made his way toward a box set in the door of the hangar. He hated the job before him, for he knew that it would spoil the morale of his outfit, and his outfit was the pride of the service. He cursed the combination of circumstances which forced him to do a thing nicely calculated to spoil the effectiveness of the organization on which the Air Service was depending, just a few days before it would be called on to prove itself as it never had before.

His six-feet-four of skin and bones became visible from the waist up as he mounted the box. Beneath his pilot's wings a row of faded ribbons indicated his distinguished war service. Silence fell suddenly as he faced his men.

"Men, I hate to say what I'm going to, but I have no choice. You have all heard something of the sudden efforts to institute great economies in the running of the Government. As one step in its share of this campaign to reduce expenditures, the Air Service has cut down the appropriation for the fifty per cent. flying pay until only flight sergeants in this squadron can draw it. That means that all you other mechanics will lose that fifty per cent. extra which you have been rightfully drawing, and which I believe you should draw."

He went on, talking earnestly, in a plea that the men keep a stiff upper lip and continue to work as they had in the past for the good of the project. He stressed the fact that the enlisted men had been picked from the whole service as carefully as the officers —that on them rested a great responsibility not only to their own service but for the contribution of new and amazing facts to the art of war.

As he talked he felt the response which finally came grudgingly from the bitter, disappointed airplane experts. Here and there faces showed still sullen in contrast to

the others, but most of the clean-cut youngsters and tanned old-timers met him eye to eye as he talked.

"That's all, men," the captain finished. "It's just pack up our troubles for a while, and hand our pilots ships in the pink of condition. They're going out there to sea on a great test—a test which will undoubtedly mean more than any of us know to the country, and to every individual man in the Air Service. You fellows are indispensable assets, so work like ——!"

On the fringe of the slowly disintegrating crowd Tony Severa stood motionless, his head down. A mechanic's hat was set carelessly on his sleek black head. His boldly handsome face, marred by a constant expression of settled sullenness, was now convulsed. Bitter obscenity, spoken in Italian, flowed from his lips in a whisper.

Finally he walked slowly down the line toward the ship on which he was working. As he walked his thoughts were as frantic as Latin blood and a twisted temperament could make them. Five minutes before there had come to Severa the straw which broke the camel's back.

He flopped down in the shade of one of the great thirty-five foot wings of his Martin. For the thousandth time his sullen thoughts ranged backward. He, the lowly mechanic, had once been a cadet at the Caproni school in Italy. It was then that the passion which ruled the later years of his life had once again got him into hot water.

For Severa was a natural foe of law and order. Any species of restraint threw him into a rage. It was natural that he should become an anarchist, of a kind, and revel in turbulent meetings with his fellow zealots. Time after time he had been in trouble in Rome, before the war.

He was a man of fiery courage—not even his bitterest enemies ever doubted that. He had selected the Air Service when war came, and been accepted. But in a month the strictness of the discipline, the far-off prestige of the officers, the constant succession of orders as immutable as fate, had chafed him into a frenzy. That all in authority were slave-drivers, and every one on the bottom rungs of the ladder unappreciated slaves, became the idea which obsessed him.

Just as he was about to complete his course and become a Caproni pilot it had happened. He had struck down a hated officer who had sternly brought him to book for inciting his fellow-cadets to insubordination which verged on mutiny. It was more by good fortune than good judgment that he had been able to make his way into Russia, and thence to the United States after the war was over.

He had entered the Army for two reasons —the prospect of learning English in the vocational schools and an opportunity to hide himself from pursuit. For in Russia, also, he had been the most radical of the radicals, and had once gone too far.

And all the while his mentality was becoming more unbalanced. His year in the American army was a succession of episodes which constantly strengthened his hatred of all in authority. Every salute was a symbol of the weak groveling before the strong, to him; every order another illustration of the fact that he was down and a favored few were in authority. More and more he came to brood savagely—dreaming dreams of some time striking a blow at wealth, power and authority that would shake the world.

To himself he was a man who had had position and influence in his own land, now down in the depths purely through the misuse of power on the part of those over him. Was not he, an expert pilot, compelled to do the most menial of labor, because of the inhuman machinery which had always ground him down?

And now, pitiful as it was, his pittance was to be reduced fifty per cent. Once more the underdogs were to be kicked lower. The young Italian's eyes were pools of sullen fire and his face graven with the lines of bitter passion as his forbidding gaze took in the great flying field spread before him.

Officers and men thronged the line. A De Haviland formation carrying hundred-pound-bombs took off and disappeared out over Chesapeake Bay in search of the tow target. A great three-motored Caproni was warming up, preparing for a test flight. A mile north of the field eighteen S. E. 5 scouts circled ceaselessly, diving one at a time until they darted earthward with the speed of light. In regular booms came the noise of their small twenty-five pound personnel bombs, which the pursuit flyers laid into a twenty-foot target with almost monotonous accuracy.

Five Martins taxied out sedately, squat and wicked-looking. They were carrying

six-hundred-pounders. In a few days, reflected the smoldering Severa, all these great ships would be lined up, each loaded with a ton of fiery destruction. And then, with all the notables that could be crowded aboard the vessels of the fleet watching, the ships would fling off their terrible missiles in their last and greatest bombing experiment.

There was a party of fat, smug-looking congressmen coming down the line now. Life had been a succession of distinguished visitors for days. The general of the armies, members of the cabinet, congressmen, attachés of foreign governments—Severa spat out a curse as he watched the party surround a ship and saw General O'Malley pointing. As they passed his ship he lay still with scornful indifference.

Those were the men who were constantly grinding him beneath their heels. Those plutocratic, perfectly turned-out rulers, down here to watch a show, had taken away from the men who were doing the work——

"Get to your feet!"

The command was like the snap of a whip. Severa leaped to his feet as though physically stung.

"What do you mean lying there when officers pass you?"

General O'Malley's eyes bored into Severa's, but the Italian's gaze did not immediately falter. Several officers, Captain Lawton among them, and the civilians watched silently.

"Answer me."

"I—I did not see——"

"You did see. You're one of those nincompoops who think it's smart to sneer at men in authority. Keep at attention!"

There was that in the dynamic general's voice which galvanized even the raging Severa. He knew that the man before him was a world figure—the idolized chief of the Air Service. And in that aggressive face with the flaming eyes he read a force which made him afraid.

General O'Malley did not spare his words. The veiled insult in Severa's immobility when the distinguished party passed was enough, but, as it happened, one of the members of the Military Affairs Committee who happened to be along had been chaffing the general goodnaturedly about the unconventional gambols which flyers periodically indulge in.

"The Air Service in spirit is about as much a part of the Army as the New York Fire Department," this portly gentleman had remarked.

So Severa got it, and plenty of it. It did not take over a minute, but in that time his sullen eyes fell, and he was not a weak man. When the party had gone on their way, he slumped to the ground, his eyes like molten lava and his face contorted. His hands clenched until the nails bit into the flesh in helpless rage.

Thirty minutes later the first sergeant of the 114th paid him a call.

"You will report to Captain Lawton in the squadron office at 4 P. M.," the sergeant said briskly.

He was a powerfully built, sunburned old soldier, who had been with the 114th overseas when they had flown De Havilands. Now that the 114th had become the heavy bombardment squadron on which the Air Service was depending to prove their claims his natural loyalty had grown into fetishism, which is a trait of old soldiers where their organization is concerned. Many a soldier, newly attached to the 114th for the bombing tests, had felt the weight of Sergeant Millspaugh's wrath for daring to intimate that the best organization in the world might have a slight edge on the 114th.

"What's the matter wit' you?" he inquired curiously, noting Severa's black face.

"Nothing," returned Severa sullenly.

"If there ever does get anything the matter wit' yuh, yuh'll be a sweet-lookin' beauty," remarked the sergeant impressively as he turned toward the Operations Office. "Four o'clock sharp, Spaghetti, and from the tones o' the cap'n's voice, yuh'd better start for there about three for fear yuh might be late."

Severa did not answer. Millspaugh, starting away, was undecided whether this failure to reply to a remark of the exalted top-kick was worthy a bawling out or not, finally concluding that he would let it go.

"Prob'ly's got plenty from somebody, and is due for plenty more," he soliloquized as he strode off with short, choppy strides that bespoke long years in the infantry.

The sergeant was right. When Severa reported to Captain Lawton in the private office of the squadron's barracks he found the blue eyes of the lanky young C. O. hard as steel.

"Why didn't you salute the general and

his party out there on the line today? Don't you know that the Chief of Air Service was passing you?"

Severa mumbled assent.

"Well, then what's the answer?"

Apparently there was none.

"There's been trouble with you before, Severa. Sore about the taking away of flying pay, I presume."

Severa looked up momentarily, only to meet that probing look on Lawton's thin, hard face. Commanding the biggest and most important squadron in the bombing maneuvers was telling on Lawton.

"I believe I guessed right. All I've got to say is that any man in my command who takes out his financial disappointment in disrespect to the leaders of his country is unworthy a soldier's uniform—and there are many men who are worthy of a soldier's uniform and a mechanic's arm insignia who are unworthy of a place in the 114th. Do you get that?"

Severa nodded slightly.

"Answer when I speak to you!" flared the captain wrathfully. "I ought to put you in the guard-house. The next time you stray off the chalk line, that's where you'll go. Don't think that any disappointed private can go around here insulting men wearing the uniform of an officer in the army and get away with it!"

Another tongue-lashing was Severa's portion. Lawton had been greatly humiliated by a few terse remarks the general had made to him, personally. He was young, and trying with might and main to make good on the biggest job in the air brigade, and right then the air brigade was the biggest thing in the Air Service. General O'Malley figured it the most important organization the American Army had ever had.

As commanding officer of the squadron which had been picked to fly those great new twin and three-motored bombers and to bear the brunt of the experiments which the military experts of the world were watching, he had been working night and day for three months. With the biggest job of all ahead, he was almost at the breaking-point. Not only the administration of the big outfit, but the handling of 2,000-pound bombs, the care of more than twenty great ships, the leading of his organization out to sea with the future of their service greatly dependent on what his officers accomplished—it is no wonder that Lawton was on edge.

When Severa left, the captain lighted a cigaret with a match that shook a bit as he held the flame to his smoke. There would be two or three hours of work for him that night after dinner, and he had had his usual hard day on the line.

"Thank the Lord I've only got a few like Severa," he mused as he relaxed for a moment before leaving.

His bride of a few months was waiting outside for him in the car.

The eyes that had been so hard a moment before softened amazingly as he thought of his outfit, recruited temporarily from the best the Air Service afforded. His officers were the veterans, tried and true, who had instructed, tested, patrolled the border, flown to Alaska and back—scarcely a man who had not proved himself through four years of flying. And those young fellows on the line who had jumped into the spirit of the undertaking which had brought them to Langham Field——

"I'd rather have cut off my little finger, I believe, than have to tell 'em about that flying pay," he remarked to himself as he arose from his littered desk and glanced at his wrist-watch.

His eyes hardened again, however, as he thought of Severa. The captain had been a first sergeant in the cavalry himself at the start of the war, and he knew the spirit which prompted acts such as Severa's.

"If I didn't need crew chiefs worse than I need a rest, I'd bust him," was his last thought about work as he joined his charming young wife.

From a window in the barracks a group of tired mechanics watched the car pull away. Sergeant Millspaugh came walking down the aisle between the cots, glancing keenly from side to side to note any beds without name tags on them. There was an inspection by a large party of high-rankers and civil officials due on the morrow.

"The cap'n's wife's a good-looker, ain't she?" remarked one of the men.

"Best lookin' half o' the combination, all right," grinned young Boles, sitting down on his bed to remove his greasy coveralls.

"That ain't sayin' much," interjected old Sergeant Griswold, who was chief mechanic of one of the flights. "The cap'n'd never be shot for his beauty."

It was then that Severa spat out a vile remark—and one which did not concern the captain himself. Almost before he had

finished it he felt a hand on his shoulder, and his body spun around to face the blazing eyes of the first sergeant. The next moment a huge fist smashed home flush on the Italian's nose.

"Yuh'll keep your —— dirty mouth shut around these barracks from now on, because when I git t'rough wit' yuh yuh won't be able to talk," grated Millspaugh as he stood over the bleeding mechanic.

The other men gathered in a circle, silent and interested. Accustomed as they were to the unending, and usually meaningless obscenity which often characterizes army conversation, the lowest of them had disapproved instinctively of Severa's remark. It was the fruit of the terrible savagery which had been aroused in him that day.

He met the sergeant's implied challenge, with a kind of murderous delight. He knew, as all the men knew, that Millspaugh was a veteran of the days when the top-kick had to have something besides his stripes to enforce his authority, and he did not care.

Millspaugh gave him a fair chance to get to his feet. Then he aimed a right swing for the jaw which would have written *Finis* to the fight right there if it had landed, but it did not. Instead, a weighty uppercut reached Millspaugh's pugnacious jaw, and shook him from head to heels.

Before he could recover Severa was on him like a snarling beast. He beat a tattoo on Millspaugh's mahogany face with blows which lost force because of the Italian's blind rage. In a few seconds the retreating sergeant, unable to collect himself, was forced backward until he fell over a cot. His opponent was on him like a wild man, diving completely over the cot to alight on Millspaugh's twisted body.

It was not a pretty struggle from then on. The two men never got higher than their knees, and once Severa got a chance to lift Millspaugh's head in his hands and smash it to the floor. Most men would have been out of the fight right there, but Millspaugh, weak and bleeding profusely from mouth and nose, twisted out of his maddened opponent's clutches and with arms and legs wound himself around Severa.

Severa bit and kicked in a frenzy of rage. His eyes were like a madman's. He was almost helpless in Millspaugh's grip, which was a mercy for Millspaugh. For perhaps thirty seconds Severa wore himself out in his writhing, twisting effort to gouge and tear his opponent. Then, without warning, Millspaugh got into action. He let go his hold, and got to his feet like a flash. As Severa scrambled up, leaping for Millspaugh before he was well on his feet, a tremendous blow on the ear sent him spinning into the next cot.

Shaking the blood from his mouth and nose, the sergeant leaped in. One, two to the jaw and stomach, and then an uppercut which carried all the force of his stocky body with it. Severa was lifted clear of the floor apparently—anyhow, his body fell on the other side of the cot.

He was still game, although the dispassionate onlookers could not approve of his methods.

When he staggered to his feet to meet the onrushing Millspaugh he held a heavy hob-nailed boot in his hand. The trench shoe caught Millspaugh fairly on his upflung left wrist, and the arm dropped as though paralyzed. Severa, his eyes gleaming with insane triumph, lifted the shoe again in both hands as Millspaugh staggered back, but before it descended the end came.

Even as the heavy weapon reached the top of the swing Millspaugh leaped in. Severa had thought he was groggy with pain, perhaps—if so, he had miscalculated. That right, flush to the side of the jaw, carried the momentum of the leap plus the almost demoniacal rage which Severa's last blow had generated in the sergeant's mind. Severa dropped like a felled ox, and lay unconscious in a widening pool of his own blood.

Millspaugh staggered back against a post, upheld by solicitous soldiers. He spat out a tooth.

"I guess that'll hold *him*," he said through bloodied lips that smiled crookedly. "Pick 'im up and stick 'im under a shower. And then, by ——, every one o' yuh see that yuh're all ready for inspection t'morrow. I'm lookin' t'rough the barracks right after supper, and —— help the man that ain't ready from bunk t' brogans!"

The sergeant was strictly business where the prestige of the 114th was at stake.

THE next three days were tense for the whole air brigade. Many months before General O'Malley had stated before the world what he believed the Air Service could accomplish in defending the country against a hostile fleet. He

had been given authority to collect the cream of his service to prove his claims. For three months the outfit had worked, and one by one submarines, destroyers, and an obsolete battle-ship, bombed at night, had gone down before the attack of the airmen. The world had wondered a bit at the accuracy and skill of the flyers, but there was always the thought that perhaps the biggest and most modern of battle-ships could withstand the attack. Those lighter vessels meant little—what could the airmen do to the real navy—the battle-ships?

And perhaps there was a little doubt among the airmen themselves. That *Friesland* lying out there eighty miles at sea, but three years before the pride of the German navy, was like some great monster mocking at the small fleas which believed they could pierce its skin.

It was the biggest test—on its success rested comparative success or failure for the whole project. So, little by little, the tension increased, as officers and men turned to with a spirit that would not be denied to prepare for it. They were like a team going into the world's series—the preliminary campaign was won, but the big test against a rival worthy of their steel was to come.

Severa, working grudgingly, was in a maze of revengeful thoughts. Vague ideas of vengeance floated ceaselessly before his mind's eye, and hour after hour he solaced himself with imaginary visions of complete retaliation. He was constantly in search of some method whereby he might revenge himself, at one swoop, on Captain Lawton, Millspaugh, the squadron itself, in which his life was now a nightmare.

His fellows razzed him about his blackened eyes and plastered nose, and every taunt was like a lash on raw flesh. He hated Millspaugh with a consuming hatred which was little short of murderous. Captain Lawton was simply the personal representative of the mighty—the class which he had hated all his stormy life.

It was two days before the bombing of the *Friesland* was scheduled that a definite idea of revenge began to take shape in his mind. Working as little as possible, and that little with a sneer which constantly irked his superiors and forced them to goad him on, he now looked with contempt on the flaming spirit of the 114th. He laughed mentally at the tireless pilots who helped groom their big ships for the long ride out to sea; at the bombardiers who set and reset their sights and overhauled their bomb-racks with a pride and determination beyond understanding; at the eager mechanics who leaped to their work as though inspired.

There were bomb-racks to change for the tremendous 2,000-pound bombs, and the loading of the bombs themselves, which is neither a light nor a safe job. Thirteen men had been killed not so long before in a ground explosion, but the bomb squad worked as though life itself depended on their getting through in the shortest possible time. Pilots were queried eagerly when they came down from test flights, and, if there was the slightest detail wrong, the mechanics of that particular ship did not sleep until it was righted.

Captain Lawton was here, there, everywhere. Severa smiled contemptuously at the recollection of the captain soldering one of the radiators on his Martin the morning before, when his own mechanics were helping pull a motor in another ship which had suddenly gone wrong. There could be no revenge so complete as the failure of the 114th in its greatest test. Officers and men alike, from General O'Malley down to the lowest gas-truck driver, would be totally cast down—Captain Lawton would never forget it as long as he lived. He would be a broken man if there was a fiasco—and Severa would see to it that there was, if he had to spend ten years in Leavenworth for it!

He lay on the line, five minutes before time to start the afternoon's work, and hugged the thought of his revenge. Every other mechanic but himself was already at work. Even the pilots were working. They swarmed around their Martins; and, down the line where the D. H. squadrons were quartered, there was similar activity. The members of the pursuit squadron were even more energetic. Five of them were in the air, circling their target a mile away from the field.

One by one each scout swooped down in breath-taking dives. Two hundred feet from the ground a tiny Cooper bomb would leave the ship, speeding earthward along the same line of flight as the ship. Like a flash the single-seater would zoom, and then came the explosion. The S. E.'s and De Havilands with their smaller bombs could not damage the *Friesland* much, but they could show that distinguished gathering of onlookers what they could do to

personnel on board a vessel. The pursuit men were vowing to lay bombs down every smoke-stack. Furthermore, they could do it, as they proved daily on the target.

But the 114th must sink the *Friesland*, and, if spirit counted for anything, they would. He, himself, had once felt the stirrings of that pride in his outfit, Severa reflected as he got to his feet lazily and started toward his Martin. There had been a vague pleasure as the victorious Martins came home from sinking a destroyer, a glimmering of admiration for the pilots and bombardiers who had done it.

With that recollection the sweetness of his revenge came back to him, for he rarely looked at a flyer without the stirring of envy and revolt in his heart. Once he had been one of them—now——

But how downcast those same cocky youngsters would be in two days! And he was the man who would accomplish their downfall. The laughing-stock of the Army would be the 114th Squadron, a miserable failure on their greatest test.

There would be a considerable chance to take, but he would take it cheerfully. In fact, the more he thought about it, the less the chance appeared to be. With any luck at all, he could carry it through successfully and emerge without a scar.

His dark, brooding face wore a smile all through his desultory afternoon's work, and through the monotonous labor of helping load bombs all the next day. At six o'clock the last huge projectile was on its racks, and sixty-five ships were lined up cross-wise of the field on the western edge.

They would take off toward Chesapeake Bay, which bounded the field on the eastern rim. Twenty Martins formed the two first ranks of the line-up, loaded with one 2,000-pound bomb each. Two Handley-Pages and a giant Caproni completed the 114th's representatives. Behind them thirty De Havilands, carrying two three-hundred pound bombs apiece, were in three ranks of ten each. The last two ranks were of S. E. 5 single-seaters, each loaded with eight twenty-five pound bombs.

The Martins, being slower to get in formation and fifteen miles an hour less in rated speed, would take off first. While they were forming into V's for the long trip out the De Havilands and S. E.'s would take off and speed directly out to sea. The S. E.'s would attack first, then the De Havilands, and by the time they were through demonstrating what would happen to personnel on deck the 114th would be there, carrying with them the hopes of the Air Service.

The tired officers and mechanics straggled home to supper, but their work was not yet done. Each one of those ships had to be gassed and oiled during the evening, and groomed for the last time. It was midnight before the last man had gone, and only a few guards were left around the hangars on the southern side to give an appearance of life to the moon-silvered field where that mighty flotilla waited passively for the time to start its deadly work.

IT WAS two-thirty in the morning before Severa figured it wise to start operations. He slipped out of the window behind his bed in the barracks, and went down to the field by a circuitous route. There was a back road behind the hangars of the pursuit group, which were on the western end. The guard on that post had a long beat, and it was very simple to elude him. There were only a few guards at Langham, for fire prevention.

Severa slipped over to the Martins, and in a moment was safely in the deep shadow cast by the wings of the first ship. In his coveralls there were all the tools he needed.

He went to work swiftly and surely, never leaving the deep shadow of the ships. It was only the work of a few seconds to unscrew gas plugs and drain more than half the gas out of each tank. Then a little work on the bomb-racks, and he would be through. The bomb-racks are hung on the sides of a big square compartment directly behind the pilots' seats, and their principle, described without detail, is simply the holding of the bombs by hooks which fit corresponding rings on the bombs. Two levers in the observer's cockpit, in the extreme nose of the ship, work wires which release these hooks and aim the bombs. Severa cut these wires.

His dark face was exultant as he worked without interruption. The gas which he drew out would evaporate. By removing the glass covers of the gas gages, which are never accurate anyway, it was easy to insert a plug which kept the needle standing at "full," and then replace the cover of the instrument. The Martins would fly out to sea, and when the time came to attack, with the Atlantic fleet and all that distinguished

audience on the control ship watching, not a ship would drop a bomb, because the levers would not work. And in a few minutes ship after ship would go down into the sea for lack of gas, and the trouble with the bomb-racks would never be ascertained.

No one would be killed, probably, because there would be a line of destroyers seven miles apart all the way out to pick up soaked aviators. What a fiasco that would be! The 114th a tremendous failure, Captain Lawton disgraced, every heavy bombardment ship lost in the sea.

And there was not a chance in a million that it would ever be discovered before the take-off. Each crew chief knew his ship was full of gas and oil, and with the gages showing full there was no way to tell save by unscrewing gas-caps, which would never be done except in some exceptional case where there was trouble with air pressure or something of that sort.

Severa, wiping the sweat from his face, glanced swiftly eastward. The first grayness of coming dawn was lightening the shadowed sky. There was one Martin yet to fix—should he chance it?

He looked at his wrist-watch. He had half an hour before the men were due to arrive, and it was still dark as pitch, for the moon had gone down. And it would be too bad to have one ship spoil the full effect of his work.

He decided to do it. Just as he was starting he heard footsteps coming toward him from the pursuit group hangars. With a quick stab of fear in his heart he climbed swiftly up into the pilot's cockpit and hid himself behind the high cowling.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, thudding softly on the grass. Finally they stopped, very close to the Martin, which was on the end of the line.

Deep silence, while in the east dawn was breaking, its gray light flooding the world. The desperate Severa was almost beside himself. He would be caught like a rat in a trap. That man down there might have seen him, but there was a dim chance that perhaps he might just be an early bird out to look over his ship before the others arrived.

There was only one thing to do, and that might as well be tried now. The ominous silence of that nocturnal visitor was almost driving him insane.

He stretched sleepily and stood up, yawning. He met the narrowed eyes of Sergeant Millspaugh, and right there hope fled. The gun on Millspaugh's hip told plainly the reason for his appearance on the scene—he was sergeant of the guard that night and had probably been making an inspection.

"So it's you, is it?" inquired the stocky sergeant deliberately. "I thought I seen somebody tinkerin' around out here."

"I—I work late last—a—night and I fall asleep here," replied Severa, his bold black eyes on the floor of the cockpit where he was standing on a level with Millspaugh's head.

"You're a liar," stated Millspaugh deliberately. "At one o'clock yuh was in bed."

Severa mentally cursed with a rage that amounted to insanity at the combination of circumstances which had made his own first sergeant on guard that night, so that he could check up the explanation offered.

With one hand placed significantly on his gun Millspaugh said:

"Stay right where yuh are, wop, for a minute. I don't like the looks o' this."

Neither did Severa. All the gas drawn from the last Martin would not have evaporated as yet, and if Millspaugh was wise he might work out an explanation. In that event, Leavenworth for life faced Severa.

Almost with the thought came the desperate scheme by which he might yet be saved. His brain was whirling as one hand dropped to gas levers on the side and the floor. He turned them on without the investigating Millspaugh noticing him, for both pet-cocks were below the level of the cowling. He turned on the switches on the left hand motor, which was toward Millspaugh. His eyes glowed madly as they rested on the stocky form of the sergeant, and memories of that terrific beating thronged his mind to help steady the determination which filled him.

Millspaugh came back slowly, his eyes baleful. As Severa had hoped he walked up to the cockpit, standing just below it in full line with the propeller just over his head. He rested one hand on it, and negligently removed his revolver with the other.

"I ain't sure, but I shouldn't be surprized if I had yuh wit' the goods, young fellah. Leastways, we'll let the cap'n decide. Climb out o' there—I don't know nothin' about ships, but I wouldn't have anybody go up in one you was fiddlin' around in the middle——"

Quick as light Severa pressed the starting button on the left hand motor. The great six foot propeller shot down squarely on the right shoulder of Millspaugh, who dropped like a log. It was almost a miracle that the motor itself caught without priming, but it did, and in a second the tip was whirling within a foot of the bleeding, unconscious sergeant.

The field was astir now, and a few hundred yards away Severa noted a guard standing motionless with surprize. A light in the operations room of the 114th showed that some officers were already out. He took no chances with the right hand motor, but climbed out like a monkey and primed it. He snapped on one switch and pressed the starter. The big Liberty started without a murmur, and both motors roared along in even rhythm.

From the long row of hangars two men came running with long strides. It was full daylight now, and Severa could see that one of them was the captain. He jazzed his throttles and set the spark way forward, then took time to glance down at the body of grizzled old Sergeant Millspaugh. *He* was paid in full for that beating, and there was still a chance for escape.

Captain Lawton was not two hundred yards away when he heard both Libertys spring into full cry and the Martin start majestically across the field. Severa listened to the purr of the motors and laughed. The temperature was only thirty, centigrade, but oil pressure and air were working perfectly. As long as both motors were hitting, why should he care? He thanked his lucky stars that he had a full load of gas and oil.

There was a strange exhilaration as he pushed forward on the wheel with all his strength and felt the big Martin answer. The speed across the ground increased, and although his take-off was a zig-zag, due to his long lay-off from flying, he got the Martin into the air safely. It was almost child's play to fly this Martin compared to the three-motored Capronis he had trained on.

Three hundred feet high, out over the bay, he turned the wheel and applied rudder. The bank was a shaky one, and once the nose of the ship got high in the air, but he caught it in time. He synchronized his motors until both were turning fourteen hundred and fifty, as he had been accustomed to do on Capronis. A quick glance at his instrument board showed the batteries charging, the temperature approaching seventy, and oil pressure twenty-five.

He turned westward, where the deserted stretches of mountains and ravines and natural hiding-places lay. What was ahead of him he knew not, nor did he greatly care. It was a chance for life, and he did not regret what he had done. He only hoped that Millspaugh was dead, and that his work on the ships would not be discovered.

He looked backward and downward at Langham through the morning haze, and cursed it.

CAPTAIN LAWTON, closely followed by Jim Broughton and a group of enlisted men, was kneeling beside the mangled Millspaugh before the Martin was fifty feet high. In gasping sentences Millspaugh told his story. By the time he had finished there was an excited swirl of men around the Martins.

"Everybody quiet!" yelled Captain Lawton, and all eyes left the Martin overhead and the broken body on the ground to center on the captain.

"Millspaugh believes Severa, through revenge, has jimmed up our ships some way. Everybody to their ships, make a complete inspection, and repair all damage possible. Broughton, go get General O'Malley and tell him we must have every man on Langham Field out here immediately. Here comes the ambulance for Millspaugh, so forget him for a while. Here, you and you go start that S. E. on the end of the line. I'll be there in a minute."

They scattered swiftly to obey his terse commands. There was a look on the young captain's thin face that was deadly; and his eyes were like incarnate hatred burning in his pale, skeleton-like countenance.

He helped the ambulance men put Millspaugh on a stretcher.

"Have you got strength enough to tell me whether Severa had any grudge against you, or did he attack you because you caught him?" he asked slowly, his mouth to the sergeant's ear.

"I—I licked 'im—a—a few days—ago," gasped Millspaugh.

"Why?"

"He—he said something about your—wife," muttered Millspaugh, the light of delirium commencing to flicker in his eyes.

As the ambulance drove away slowly the 180-horsepower motor of the little scout

began to roar. The captain made for it with long strides, fastening his helmet, which he had held in his hands all the while, as he ran.

The mechanic climbed out quickly.

"Pull the blocks," ordered the airman crisply, and glanced westward for a moment where a speck showed in the sky.

He took off without a glance at instruments. As soon as he was off the ground he pulled the scout up in a steep chandelle and took off after the Martin. He knew he could catch Millspaugh's murderer in half an hour, for his ship was at least fifteen miles an hour faster than the Martin, heavily loaded as it was.

With his head and body almost grotesque above the cowling, due to his height and leanness, Captain Lawton flew wide open like some grim bird of prey. In his mind there was room for no thought of consequences—all there was in him was seething wrath which drove him on to pay Severa his due.

Little by little the speck ahead grew larger. The flyer deigned to glance over his instruments once or twice, and adjust the shutters to compensate for the rapidly heating motor. He put the little scout in a steeper climb as the Martin showed only a mile ahead, and succeeded in keeping his position without loss and at the same time gaining a thousand feet of altitude. He was now twenty-five hundred feet high, and the Martin about fifteen hundred.

They were over deserted country now—occasional isolated houses, but mostly clumps of trees alternating with small, rough fields. Severa was bound for the mountains of West Virginia, Lawton figured. With a smile which held nothing of humor in it Captain Lawton congratulated himself savagely that the Italian would never reach his haven.

Less than thirty miles from Richmond, southward, he was flying directly over Severa. With gun full on he nosed over steeply and dived. The seventy-foot wingspread of the Martin floated along below him; and the flyer noted dispassionately that Severa's face was upturned in terror.

A hundred and seventy-five—two hundred miles an hour, and he was three hundred feet above the Martin, with the nose of his ship pointed straight at it. Two hundred feet, a hundred, fifty—and he pulled the bomb release. He pulled up in a steep zoom, but not quite quickly enough. He had not seen the small bomb drop, but the tremendous wrench which shook his S. E. and turned it upside down was the acme of exquisite sensation to him. For a thousand feet he fought that most unusual of things—an outside spin. It seemed as though centrifugal force, which contrary to its effect in an ordinary spin, was trying to throw him clear, would be too much for his belt.

With stick held way back and opposite rudder clamped on firmly he finally brought his ship out, upside down. An outside spin starts from an upside down position, and ends that way.

With a terrific swoop the ship dived down and out, wabbling in every wire and strut, three or four hundred feet from the ground. The broken Martin, in sections, was still falling, although the front part of the fuselage and the motor had crashed to the ground. Not a sign of Severa could he see as he searched the ground. Perhaps the bomb had hit the Italian and blown him to bits. If so, it was an excellent shot, Lawton reflected.

He turned eastward, and mercifully throttled the motor which had stood by him so well. He must get back to Langham—the bombing of the *Friesland* loomed only an hour ahead.

THE men of Langham Field succeeded in repairing the damage Severa had done, and the 114th got out to sea only an hour late. It took them seventeen minutes to sink the *Friesland.*

Sergeant Millspaugh's arm would be useless the rest of his life. After Captain Lawton got back from leading his men over the *Friesland* he spent a great deal of time with the old non-com. who had been with him since overseas days. He had a great deal of time, for it was a couple of months before he was whitewashed for the death of Severa. His counsel before the court-martial succeeded in tracing Severa's career to a great enough extent to show that Lawton had rid the service of a man whose only crime had not been that plot against the 114th and the attempted murder of Millspaugh. As for the captain, his killing of the Italian never bothered him in the slightest.

"It must have been terrible to see Severa blown up and to know that you did it," his wife said one time with a little shudder.

Her husband's reply was made with a boyish grin which bespoke his sincerity.

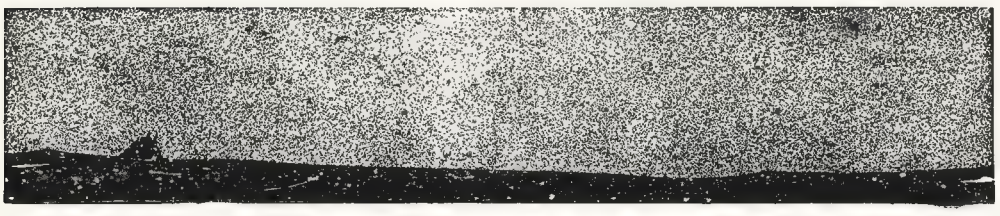
"Why, honey, I haven't had so much fun since the hogs ate my brother," he said.

ABLE-BODIED SEAMAN

by Bill Adams

I'VE got a pair o' socks, an oilskin coat,
An' a pound o' black terbacker;
An' there's a clipper signin' on 'er crew!
She's bound around the Horn, in Winter—to t'other side.
It's a long way round the Horn in Winter—cold seas an' wide!
But that big cracker's signin' on 'er crew!
What would you 'ave an "able-bodied" do,
If 'e's only got a pair o' socks, an' a oilskin coat,
An' a pound o' black terbacker?
An' a big ship, a reg'lar fly-foot cracker,
Is wantin' men?
Lor' love us, son, it ain't no use to growl;
There's worse things done!
Old Peter 'Ansen went to sea wi' me one time,
An' 'e didn't 'ave no oilskins, nor no boots.
You'd ought'er 'eard 'im sing the first night out:
Like a young boy what's just let out o' school!
He set them ship bells ringin',
An' all of us a-laughin' at 'is singin';
An' both 'is feet was bare, an' 'is old 'ide
Was shinin' in the star-light!—*I'll* make out.
The chantey-man will sing, the mate will shout—
" 'Op up aloft an' shake them topsails free."
The first man in the riggin' will be me!
For I'm a able-bodied, an' that tough
The old sea winds can't blow not 'ard enough
But what I'll sing an' giv' 'em back their tune.
That's me!—I've never 'ad no mother but the sea,
An' sea winds singin'. God knows where *I* was born!
So-long!—so-long!
Aye! meet me off the Horn!
That's it! I'll wave my 'at to you,
If I 'ave got a 'at by when that day shall be
I'll wave it to you;
You wave yours to me.
Luck to you ship-mate!—socks, an' coat, an' 'backer,
An' me is off to join the fly-foot cracker!

"*Able-Bodied Seaman*," *copyright*, 1922, *by B. M. Adams.*



THE PRICE OF LEADERSHIP

by F. ST. MARS

Author of "Sunwing," "Another Pawn of Fate," etc.

BEAUTY and ugliness are a matter of taste, of course, but by no standard of taste could Chacma be called anything but frankly and unashamedly ugly, and a beast. A beast, if you will, possessing qualities which marked him off as in some respects, in many respects, immeasurably above his fellow beasts, but throughout it all he remained just pure brute.

Because he was a monkey Chacma possessed the glimmerings of a soul—some sort of soul, as we understand the word. Because he was a monkey of exceptional strength of thew and sinew, of jaw, and muscle *and* mind, he was a—devil.

In short, Chacma was a baboon, an "old man" baboon, as the settlers say—whatever that defines—and a great brute—bigger than a mastiff, hairy, heavy-forearmed, deep-chested, dog-jawed, scowling visaged, sullen, and an old, wicked-minded ruffian to boot. But Chacma—T'chackamma in full—was more than that; he was a giant of his race, such a one as a hunter may see once in many expeditions covering years—or he may never see at all. There are records of such as Chacma, once, as we say, in a blue moon. Probably there are more than are recorded, however.

In the inky caves upon the *krantze*, or kopje, the temperature registered 120°. Heaven knew what it was outside in the shadeless, blistering heat, where the shimmering rocks felt red hot to the touch, and the heat flurry quivered, and the mirage played tricks with the eyes, certainly very much more than any 120°, and enough to cook a joint, and breed the biggest thirst that ever cracked a palate. It was —— with the lid lifted, and hot at that.

Chacma had stood it as long as he could, then got up—till that moment he had been invisible in his greeny-black coat, by the by—and slowly slouched down to a pool of green scum, which apparently disguised some water of sorts—and don't ask me how it came to remain there—about a quarter way up from the foot of the *krantze*.

Seeing him go, others of the troop of dog-faced baboons, which Chacma ruled with a jaw of iron, thought safe to follow him; to wit, one worried, thin-barrelled mother with a troublesome, surprized-looking youngster, one old spinster, sour as a lemon, and a funny little, half-grown chap, very thirsty, but very much in awe of his elders.

Chacma, with his peculiar man-beast sort of deliberate walk and sidelong low-browed scowl upon all things, reached the pool—first, of course—drank with studied slowness, and as deliberately sat down—to scratch.

The wasp-waisted mother arrived next, drank, and turned to erase a scorpion,

whose lobster-like claws had foolishly moved from under a near-by rock, and no sooner was her back turned than her brat of a youngster must needs skip down to copy her, overbalance—baboons drink rather clumsily—and tumble head first, with a considerable splash, into the pool.

Ah! But what of it? A bath is nothing, and all young animals can swim. Yes, but, my friends, that was an African pool, and I tell you it is not good for babies of any breed to fall into them. The good God, he hides all the things too horrible to be seen, even in those infernal parts, sometimes in water. And, of course, the babe kicked up no end of a row, as all baby monkeys do.

The mother, however, was in heated argument with the scorpion, who wanted to live, and—well, perhaps she was "fed up with kids!" that morning. Anyway, she failed to respond quickly enough.

Not so Chacma, however. That old ruffian turned deliberately, where he sat upon white-hot rock, fished the "man overboard" out by the scruff of his small neck—that look of surprize still fixed upon the little beggar's old-fashioned face—landed him a number one smack that produced shrieks beyond beaten pigs, and roughly twisted the mother round to see her own job.

In the same instant, almost, and as if the shrieks had called it—which they probably had—even as the half-grown, odd, stunted little baboon, sitting higher up the slope, respectfully waiting for Chacma the terrible to move off, gave one horrified yell, falling backward as he did so, a yellow streak blew, literally blew—certainly it never seemed to touch ground—up the slope and on top of the recently spanked baby.

There was one agonized, terror-stricken scream, and—the yellow streak was blowing down the slope again, so quick—so quick, that there was scarcely time to tell what it might be. And the baby baboon that had been spanked went with that thing—and in its jaws.

Then the yellow streak stopped—stopped, flying along at full speed and in its own length. It had to. Chacma stood in the path of it.

At most times, at any time, indeed, Chacma was not sweet to look upon. At that moment he was perfectly, simply, and unashamedly diabolical. His long dog face, his evil, hard, debauched, one-fifth-human eyes, his bristling, coarse greeny crest, his uncouth human-beast form, and, above all, his almost demoniacal rage—all together made up a *tout ensemble* calculated to stop very much worse things even—if that were possible—than yellow streaks, this same being, as a matter of fact, a leopard.

One can only presume that that leopard must have been sore pushed with hunger—possibly because of cubs to feed, or some old wound to hinder hunting—to have risked the death and worse that is indicated by an attack upon baboons in daytime.

One may be sure that leopard regretted having taken the risk, in that awful tense moment which followed when she stopped dead and stared Chacma measuringly between the eyes.

But there was worse behind.

She could hear the "old man" baboons of the troop rallying to the stricken mother, and the bitten baby's cries. Also there was no way round. Perhaps she cursed the hobbledehoy who had given the alarm two seconds before she reckoned upon it. Anyway, it was death or the devil for her, and as, with bared, shining fangs, flattened ears, and malignant, smoldering eyes, she glared round, seeking the weakest spot in the foe's chain, now closing in upon her to the accompaniment of clattering stones, as the mature male baboons rushed down to the rescue, she chose—the devil.

That evil physiognomy of Chacma's alone stood between her and freedom.

THE leopard dropped her prey—, who fled limping and awaking the echoes—and with two, three, hard, rending, coughing grunts—she charged! To be more exact, she threw her eighty pounds of nickel-steel and death downhill, at somewhere about the speed of a baseball. It was nothing you could see—actually see—that charge. You could only feel aware of it. The quickest shot in all the wide world would have been too slow, yards too slow, to stop her, even if she could be stopped—dead.

And Chacma stood up to that living thunderbolt of death. Terrified, perhaps, but maddened with rage beyond all terror, he faced grimly that she fiend.

The impact that followed was no thing to write about, nor the demoniacal and frenzied "worry" that followed the impact. The human eye is at times, mercifully, too

slow. One was aware only that two beasts were rolling over and over together down that sizzling hill, in a burning shroud of dust; and one could almost *see* death hovering above, ready to pounce.

Then the rest of the male baboons flung themselves upon the combatants in one ravening avalanche, and all went out in choking dust and din.

When it was all over, the male baboons, the fathers of families, moved slowly away, grunting and grumbling hoarsely; some limping, some worrying wounds, some—these were they who had not got in to the close-fought clinch—greatly excited and inclined to fight.

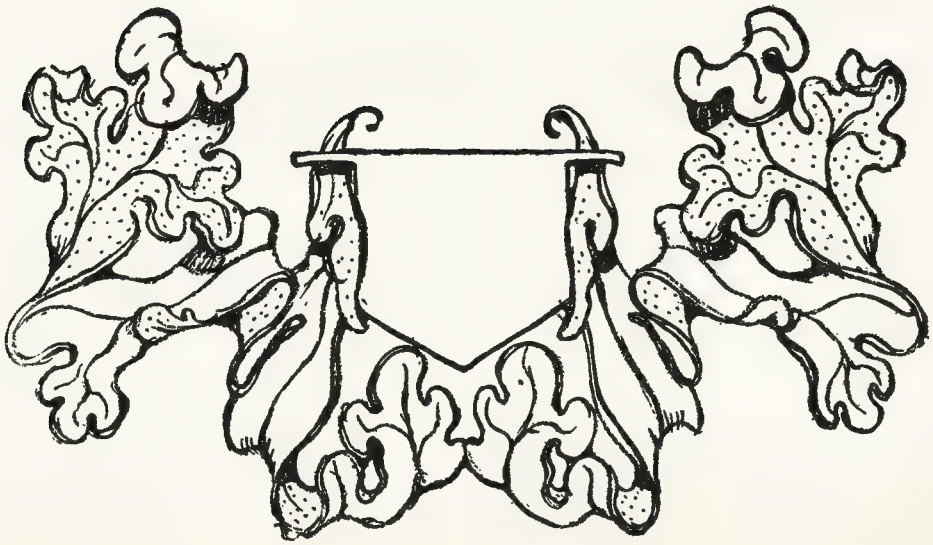
The mothers had already sought the highest rocks, calling and clasping their young. The older young needed no calling; they were there first. One or two, not for the moment parents, stood lower down, watching the battle and half inclined to join in. A group of chattering young males had gathered lower still, egging one another on.

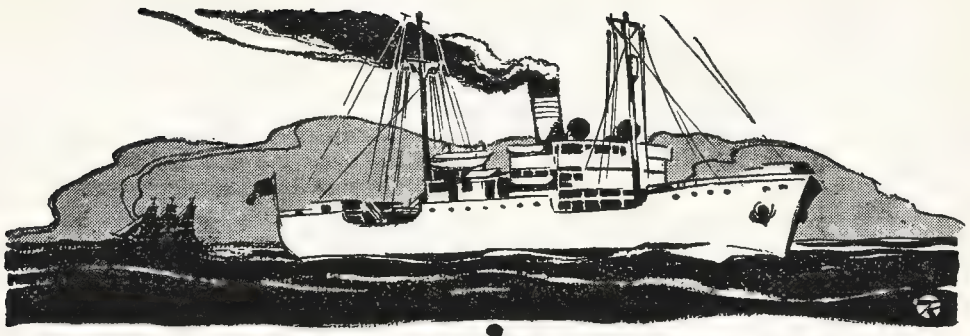
The old male baboons opened out and climbed with deliberation, at last, and one could see what was left behind—could behold that thing which was left behind.

There was no sign of the leopard; at least, there was no sign of anything one could swear to truthfully as ever having been any beast resembling a leopard. There was only something, a smudge upon the sandy rocks, but what, precisely, it were tempting Providence and one's nerves to approach and see.

Also there was something else. *It* was certainly alive, for it got up and crawled a yard or two in the direction of the rock-pool, and fell down again and never rose after. It was in trouble, that thing—desperate and extreme trouble, so that it could not refrain from looking like it, but it said no word.

It was Chacma, who, alone and unsupported, had faced the terrible full charge of the spotted devil of the wilderness; who had gathered to his own breast those claws, which, in a second, could tear the head of almost any beast to ribbons; had met, jaw to jaw, those fangs that could crush in the skull of almost any animal like an egg; had bitten, and fought, and had, before he could be rescued by his compatriots, died, fighting to the end, for the sake of a baby baboon that was not his, and which fact he probably very well knew!





QUEEN'S GOLD

by A. Judson Hanna

Author of "A Dorset Man," "The Mutiny," etc.

SETH HALL was known as the most daring skipper on the China Coast. That is why Mose Legren sent for him in the matter of the Catherine Plate.

"If we can get Captain Hall to undertake the job it's dollars to shillings he'll put it through. And if he can't do it I don't know any one on this side of the world who can," Mose said to me in his queer little sentry-box office on Moon Street in Shanghai one morning late in the Fall of 1919.

"You imply a doubt about his willingness to try it," I said.

"There's a very serious doubt. It may interfere with some of his principles. He's chock-full of them, you know—has as many principles as a grasshopper has jumps."

"But there's nothing about the Catherine Plate affair that need bother the most scrupulous ship's captain," I said.

"That depends. The Russian Soviet has placed an embargo on that plate. Now you and I may say that the Reds have no right to do that, so we'll go ahead and ignore the order. But take a man like Captain Hall. He might argue that law is law, and it's unmoral to violate a law merely because we consider it oppressive. It all depends on how the proposition happens to strike him whether he attempts it or not. There's one phase of it will appeal to him."

"What's that?"

"The danger. He'll stretch a point if there's adventure to be got out of it. Tell him that something can't be done, that other men have tried it and failed, and for the time being that is the one thing in the world he considers worth doing. And there's no blinking the danger in this case. If he's caught with the plate, it's the jug for him, and Russian prisons are even less pleasant now than they used to be. But if he can land the gold in some country that hasn't recognized the Bolshevists yet, both he and the plate will be safe. And there'll be a bonus of ten thousand dollars waiting for him."

"Why such unparalleled generosity?" I asked cynically. "You are getting old, Mose; losing your grip."

For if Captain Hall was known for his daring as a navigator, Mose Legren was equally well known from Touraine to Tsingtao as the shrewdest of bargain-drivers. Men went to him for cargoes only when cargoes were not to be had elsewhere.

"It's worth it!" Legren snapped. "That stuff has been lying up there at Elizabethpol for four months now. Three men have tried to take it out and failed. Or rather, they quit cold. The Soviet agents know it is there and will turn it up one of these days. Then kiss good-by to it forever.

"Besides, Prince Carol is getting desperate at Constantinople. Like the rest of the Russian exiles there he's on his uppers; living on money borrowed from his friends—a hand-to-mouth existence. I get a letter from him every steamer-mail. He says half a cake is better than none. When you consider what that plate is worth, ten thousand bucks ain't such a —— of a lot. Now is it?"

I agreed that, everything considered, ten thousand dollars was a modest reward. But Mose was not to be placated so easily.

"Losing my grip, am I!" he growled. "Say, Johnnie, do you know what rates I made with Captain Joe Bentley his last trip out?"

"No. But I heard Captain Joe swearing that you had ruined him, and he's been sick ever since."

"What's rates got to do with gout?"

"All right, *all right!*" I shouted. "I hope Seth Hall trims the eyelashes off you. I'd like to hear you two sharks palaver."

"I'll let you know when he's coming. I know how to handle men like him. Just suggest something big to 'em, and then hold off. Men like him don't value what comes easy, but they're —— bent on getting something the other fellow doesn't want to let go of. When he sees me backing off, sort of —acting like I was sorry I had made the offer—he'll get so hungry for it the slaver'll run."

THE Catherine Plate, so called, was a banquet service of nearly six hundred pieces, solid gold, that the prodigal Catherine II. of Russia had had made for herself in Antwerp shortly after she dethroned her detested husband. At the death of the empress the service disappeared, and it was generally believed that her last lover had stolen it. It does not figure in history again till the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty, when it suddenly reappeared in the possession of Prince Carol, a cousin of the butchered Czar.

When the Kerensky régime fell, one of the first things the regicides sought was the Catherine Plate. Failing to get their hands on it, they ordered it confiscated for the State and warned the people from trafficking with it under penalty of death. This ukase, however, did not prevent Carol from having the plate melted and recast in bars for convenience of transportation, or from smuggling it as far as Elizabethpol, a seaport in the Maritime Provinces, from where he hoped to get it carried eventually to Paris.

And there the Catherine Plate rested.

Agents of the Soviet Government traced the gold as far as Elizabethpol, but lost track of it there. They knew it was in the town, but could not find it, so they settled down to await its reappearance.

By this time the seizure of the gold had almost ceased to be viewed merely as an act of the national safety. It had become a principle of government, and the red oligarchy at Moscow was prepared to spend as much money as the gold itself was worth if it might secure it ultimately, thereby teaching a grand lesson to the hated aristocracy.

So after searching every house and building in Elizabethpol without results the Soviet agents sat down to bide the time when the treasure would be brought from its hiding-place. Meanwhile they were not altogether idle. Every pound of personal baggage leaving the town, every ton of freight carried out by caravan or ship, was subjected to a scrutiny that would have done justice to a worthier cause.

With the exits of Elizabethpol guarded with such vigilance, Prince Carol and his agents almost despaired of ever seeing the Catherine Plate again. And it is not at all surprizing that men, who were brave to recklessness in other respects, refused to risk their freedom, their lives maybe, in a venture which seemed doomed at the very outset to failure.

In asking Captain Hall to go after the Catherine Plate, Mose Legren was making his last hopeful throw of the dice. If Hall declined the commission, Legren had reached a stalemate with his Soviet opponents.

And in spite of Legren's boast that he knew how to handle men like Captain Hall I was not at all sure that the two men would come to an agreement in the matter. Hall was not like any other man I knew. He was in a class by himself. He could not be bullied; he could not be bought; and it was time wasted to try to reason with him. I do not think he reasoned out things for himself. He seemed to decide matters by instinct. He either liked a thing or he didn't like it, and that was the end of it. No amount of argument could make him change his mind.

In the present instance the ten-thousand-dollar bonus would not be the deciding factor. He would consider the ethics of the proposition first. The question of recompense would be of secondary importance.

When I next saw Legren he was not nearly so confident that Captain Hall would undertake the business at Elizabethpol. Hall was at sea, but was expected to blow into Shanghai any day. Meanwhile Legren had been recalling all the stories he had heard about

Captain Seth, and they were not encouraging. He was staking everything on this last throw of the dice, and was pessimistic over the outcome.

"Take my advice, Mose, and state your proposition in as few words as possible, and don't try to influence his decision. If you do, you are going to overplay yourself. And for love of Heaven, don't say too much about the ten-thousand-dollar bonus. Just refer to it casually. If you emphasize it he'll think you are trying to bribe him to commit a crime."

To make matters worse for Legren, Hall declined to call on him. On reaching the city and finding Legren's note the captain sent the following message:

> Your note at hand asking me to call at your office in Moon Street on an important matter. I shall be very busy tomorrow morning and shall not have time to look you up. But I shall be glad to see you at the Penguin Club. I have appointments there at ten o'clock and eleven o'clock. If you can arrange to call there at ten-thirty I shall not keep you waiting.

Legren asked me what I thought of the note.

"It looks to me like a bad omen," I said. "Captain Hall knows what you want to see him about, and he's going to make you come all the way to him. If he decides that he can handle the business without besmirching himself he'll probably demand twice the bonus you offer."

"It doesn't look that way to me," Mose said. "If he knows what I want of him, and is still willing to meet me, it looks to me as if he had already decided to accept the job and merely wants to arrange the details."

When we entered the lounging-room of the Penguin Club the next morning Legren was ill at ease, nervous. Probably this was due to the novelty of trying to transact business in such a public place. Entrenched behind his desk in his own cubby-hole of an office in Moon Street, Legren was on familiar ground and rarely lost a battle there. There is something psychological about it, I suppose; but fighting a battle, even a battle of wits, on ground of his own choosing somehow puts confidence into a man. And the reverse is true—a man is at a physical disadvantage fighting on ground chosen by his opponent.

I had known Captain Hall by sight and by reputation for a year or more but had never had a close view of him. As he came forward to greet Legren I saw a man of forty-eight or fifty years—though he hadn't a gray hair to show for it—tall, broad-shouldered, with a Captain Kettle beard and bold brown eyes.

In appearance he was much like a dozen other sailing-masters I knew, except for his eyes, which were disconcertingly calm and direct as he looked at you. Also, he was handsomer than the dozen other ship's masters, and his skin was unusually white for a man who had spent his life mostly in tropic waters. He impressed me as honest, capable, and fully able to look out for himself under any adverse conditions.

"I wonder if he ever feels the need of praying for help," I asked myself; for this was the man of whom it was said that he never prayed unless he was over his head in trouble.

Which was hardly fair to him. What he had actually said was, when asked if he prayed for divine help in a storm—

"I do; but I don't look for it if I mishandle my ship."

He shook hands with us cordially enough and asked us to be seated. Legren pulled out his cigar-case, remembered that Captain Hall did not smoke, and pushed it back nervously. Hall asked me if I was a sailing-man, and then waited for Legren to begin.

"Captain, I've come to see you about the Catherine Plate," Legren said. "You've doubtless heard about it."

"More or less. In what way does it concern me?"

"I want you to go up to Elizabethpol and bring it down here."

"That's a rather large contract, isn't it? Why pick on me?"

"Because I think you are the man can handle it successfully."

Captain Hall said nothing, so after a minute Legren continued:

"I'll pay the usual rates for the coal you take up, and the same for your return trip, though you'll probably have to come back in ballast. If you can pick up a cargo there, that will be extra for you. They sometimes pick up hides at Elizabethpol."

"Coal?"

Hall shot out the one word as if it annoyed him.

"Yes. I've got together a small cargo of coal and electrical machinery as your excuse for going up there."

Still the captain said nothing, but looked steadily at the agent, waiting for the full showdown. Legren, whose nervousness was beginning to show on him, went on again—

"Win or lose, there'll be a bonus of two hundred pounds for the unusual nature of the trip, and an additional bonus of two thousand pounds if you bring back the Catherine Plate."

There was another long pause, and then Hall said—

"Well?"

"That's about all there is to it," Legren said. "Of course, if you agree to undertake the job we'll go into particulars, where the gold is, who has charge of it, and all that."

Legren should have stopped there, I thought; but Hall's next words seemed to nettle him. Negotiations were moving along as smoothly as could be expected. Hall was toying with the proposition. That meant it didn't conflict with any of his many principles. It seemed to me that he was trying merely to estimate his chances of success before committing himself.

"I expected you'd be coming to me sooner or later," he said.

Why this should get under Legren's skin I can't say. Hadn't he already told Hall that he considered him the best man for the job? I think maybe that the agent was angry at himself for having shown his embarrassment so plainly, and so now, when he found the business moving along so smoothly, he determined to reassert his manhood. So he answered with more spirit than he had yet shown:

"Well, there's Captain Joe Bentley. I think he could do the job, only he's sick."

"Why not wait till he gets over it?" Captain Seth asked coldly, and took out his watch and glanced around the room as if looking for somebody.

"Bentley won't get over it," Legren said. "Oh, I don't mean he won't be on his feet again; but gout—it takes the spring out of a man, makes him sluggish, uncertain of himself. And I'm not saying he could engineer the job as clean as you can, captain.

"Besides, the matter is pressing. Every hour of delay makes success just so much more doubtful. And twenty-two hundred pounds is twenty-two hundred pounds."

"I don't take to the idea of putting coal in my ship. It's bad enough taking on what I have to for my own uses."

When Hall said that I knew he would go to Elizabethpol for the gold, Legren sensed the same thing, for he answered carelessly:

"Forget the coal. I only thought it would help to explain your appearance in those parts."

"If I choose to run up to Elizabethpol in ballast, whose affair is that?" Hall demanded, pushing up his beard truculently.

"Suit yourself, captain; suit yourself. I'm depending on you to run that end of the business. You'll go then?"

"Aye! I'll get your plate for you."

I wanted to laugh at the man's self-assurance.

"I'll get the plate," he says, as if three men as brave as he, if not as resourceful maybe, hadn't failed at it already, frightened off by the watch-dogs of the Moscow Soviet.

"I hope so, captain; I hope so," Legren hastened to say. "Three other men have taken my money and quit almost before they started. I don't want to accuse them of deliberately planning to do me out of my money, but——"

"Of course not!" Captain Hall interposed warmly. "I know who those men are. Their intentions were honest, but they have no imagination. That is all. They couldn't picture what they were going up against, and when they found more than they had bargained with themselves for— Well, some men can meet the expected, wherever it is, and win out, but the unexpected throws them out of balance."

"And you, captain?" Legren asked with just an edge of sarcasm.

"I think I can foresee the difficulties, and I've already discounted the dangers."

"You have a plan?"

"I have, but don't ask me about it, please," Captain Hall said, smiling for the first time and looking at his watch. "I think I have time to hear the particulars; and by the way, I want a free hand in the matter. Don't lay any plans for me, for I shall disregard them, and they'll only complicate the situation. You tell me where this gold is. I get it aboard the *Orion* and bring it down here. Do we understand each other? Then tell me about Elizabethpol."

"It's a small place, four thousand people maybe, has only one street of any account, which runs along the beach. The town is important only as a distributing-center for the country thereabouts. The small

merchants—Germans and Chinese mostly—import groceries, oil and spirits, and trade them for furs, hides, and elks' horns. You'll find quite a gay little colony of Europeans there, English and American mining-engineers, Scotch factors, French concessionmen, Swedish missionaries and Russian Government officials."

Legren paused, looked around the room sharply, and went on in a lower voice:

"There's a smithy on the waterfront, a small dilapidated stone building. It is run by a Russian known as Vladimir the Red, because of his beard. He is the present keeper of the Catherine Plate. The gold is hidden at the bottom of his forge."

"Hasn't the shop been searched?" Captain Hall asked.

"It has—twice. The first time the spies overlooked the forge. They went back to examine it and were within a foot of turning up the gold. They burrowed down through the cinders in the forge till they struck a perforated iron plate that serves as the bottom, and then, finding nothing, gave up the search.

"Now that iron plate is a false bottom. Underneath it is a space about four feet square and eight or nine inches deep. It is there that the bars of gold are hidden. By removing two stones in the base of the forge below the bellows, Vladimir can rake out the gold ingots."

"He must be an honest man," Captain Hall remarked.

"Honest or not, he is faithful to this trust. He's an old retainer of Prince Carol's—had charge of the stables on the prince's estate back there near Moscow. When can you start, captain?"

"About this time three days from now. How about docking at this place?"

"I meant to speak of that. There's one small jetty there, but it's used only by fishing-boats. The bay has never been dredged. A ship drawing what your *Orion* probably does would have to anchor five or six hundred yards out and lighter the cargo."

"That suits me!" Captain Hall exclaimed.

Legren looked at him a little grimly, I thought.

"Other men have found it a distinct disadvantage in connection with the Catherine Plate," he said dryly. "They thought something might have been done if they could have brought their ships right up to the street. But, of course, you may have different plans.

"Now as to identifying yourself, captain. Vladimir can't read even his own language, so there's no use in my writing anything. But here's a passport he'll recognize. The three other men all carried it."

Legren handed a silver coin to Captain Hall, who looked it over carefully.

"Um!" he said. "A British shilling with a hole in the center. Queer open-sesame, that."

"If you'll notice the date on it, captain. That's the important part—1861. There are sixty-one bars of gold. Vladimir will look for the date on the coin first of all."

IT WAS Ben Dearing, second officer of the *Orion*, who, sitting on Legren's desk nearly a month later, told us what happened at Elizabethpol.

"We got away from here to a bad start," he began. "The Old Man had planned to pull out at ten o'clock in the morning, but ten o'clock comes and Harrison isn't on board. You know 'Babe' Harrison, the third officer and the Widow Harrison's lambkin. He's a big brute, for all his tender years, and she coddles him just as if he was still in rompers running around with scratched knees. The skipper is sweet on Ma Harrison, which complicates matters, because, you know, you can't be very hard on a boy whose mother you are courting.

"So the Old Man waits half an hour, walking the bridge and watching the dock out of those cold, glassy eyes of his. No word speaks he, but we all know what he's saying to himself.

"Then just as we are casting off a 'ricksha comes bowling down the pier with one man in the shafts and another pushing on the stern, and Babe falls out, makes a grab for the rail and pulls himself aboard. He goes right up on the bridge to report.

" 'Mr. Harrison,' the skipper says in a voice as cold as ten fathoms down, 'are you aware that you have delayed sailing half an hour?'

" 'My word, sir! It can't be that much,' Babe says, pulling out his watch. 'Awf'ly sorry, sir. I'll never forgive Ma—I mean myself—for making you late. You see, Ma cooked me a New England boiled dinner just at the last minute and was going to cry if I didn't eat it. Awf'ly glad you waited for me, captain, and— Oh, yes; here's

something Ma asked me to give to you, sir,' and he hands the skipper a note in a pink envelope.

"The Old Man sticks the note in his breast pocket and a minute later goes down to his cabin. Babe winks at me and says:

" 'I hope Ma doesn't give me away. About the New England dinner, I mean. Pretty good alibi, wasn't it? I was over on the Bund with a French girl, and she told me she would let me kiss her at ten o'clock. Did I stay?'

"You see, sir, Harrison is only a kid yet, but a —— good navigator, and the Old Man's got a soft spot for him because of that time down in Formosa when the Babe saved the *Orion*."

"How was that?" Mose asked.

"Why, you see, sir, the officers were mostly ashore when the typhoon struck us, except for the first officer and the chief engineer, and they got dog-drunk together and were helpless, and the storm came on us just as sudden as that, sir.

"Well, the *Orion* began dragging her anchors; and if it hadn't been for what Babe did she would have piled herself up on the beach, as sweet a wreck as you ever saw. And there we were, standing on shore as helpless as a pig on a hook, with the waves running man-high, the rain pelting down on us like forty, and the wind nearly lifting us out of our shoes.

"Of course, when we saw they weren't going to run for it we knew something was wrong on the ship, and were desperate to run a boat out there. But it wasn't any use. The waves just slammed it up on the beach and we all got pretty well mauled up. It's a jolly wonder some of us weren't killed. But the Old Man wouldn't give up, and the boat got smashed, and the next thing we knew, the Babe went tearing down the beach as naked as your nose, sir, and took off into the surf.

" 'The blessed fool!' the skipper roars.

"Well, just when we were picking out wreaths for the Babe and thinking up what we were going to say to his ma about it all, we saw him spidering up the port anchor chain and they pulled him aboard, and he got up steam. They say he didn't put on clothes, sir, till the *Orion* was out of sight of land.

"But believe me, sir, it was nip and tuck with the old *Orion* whether she would put to sea or berth herself on the beach. For half an hour I don't believe she gained a cable's length; but when she got a full head of steam on he jig-sawed her out where there was plenty of sea-room, and he runs her around a while till the storm blows itself out and comes back and sends off a boat for us. The Old Man's been gruff with him ever since; and that shows he's fond of him.

"I'm telling you all this, sir, because it was Babe, we think, who made all that trouble for us at Elizabethpol. My word, if he did what he's credited with up there, that boy's going to wind up in jail some day."

It seems that the *Orion* had an uneventful passage to Elizabethpol, got rid of her mining-machinery, and stayed there for a week or more, the officers having a gay time on shore. They didn't know what Captain Hall was waiting for.

As soon as the *Orion* arrived at Elizabethpol, Ben Dearing told us, Captain Hall called on the harbormaster, an English-speaking Russian and a reeking Bolshevist. He remained with the port warden more than two hours, listening to the principles of communism as expounded by the English-speaking gentleman, and drinking much vodka with him, which was considered an irregular proceeding by the ship's other officers because Captain Hall was known as an abstemious man.

The following day the reeking Bolshevist returned the call and sat most of the afternoon on the *Orion's* bridge, applauding terrorism and drinking more vodka, which the cook had brought from town that morning on the captain's orders.

That might have ended the exchange of courtesies had not Captain Hall felt moved to drop into the harbormaster's office the next morning to ask him if he could recommend a good ship's smith. He was told that there was a blacksmith down the street a little way, a man with a red beard who was drunk all the time and who occasionally did ship's work.

The captain himself called on the smith, the man who was called Vladimir the Red, and spent a long time in the smithy talking about one thing or another, I suppose, and then took him out to the ship for all the world to see, and set him to work repairing the anchor-plate of a funnel stay. Although the *Orion* was a tramp ship, her master was particular in her upkeep.

When the tinkering with the anchor-plate was done the skipper seemed to find a lot

of other things that needed repairing. He told Mr. Meekin he might go ashore as he himself would be on deck for a couple of hours, and he sent the anchor watch below to tidy up the storeroom, so he and the red-bearded smith had the deck to themselves.

Next morning the harbormaster felt it incumbent on himself to return the captain's last call. He stayed to luncheon. Dearing and Harrison didn't care, because they were finding many nice places on shore to eat at. This necessitated another visit by Captain Hall at the harbormaster's office.

All this visiting back and forth consumed days of time, and Captain Hall and the reeking Bolshevist seemed to have acquired the greatest admiration for each other. The Soviet agents guarding the Catherine Plate, whose exact whereabouts was still a profound mystery to them, seeing Captain Hall in company with the harbormaster so frequently, saluted him when he passed and began to look on him as a convert to radicalism.

If Ben Dearing and Babe Harrison and First Officer Meekin wondered what it all meant, they were content to let the fever of friendship run its course. The two younger men were having a glorious time ashore with a tennis party with luncheon every afternoon and a dinner-dance every evening. The Babe had found a big, yellow-haired, American girl, sister of a resident engineer, and returned to the ship every night deliriously happy from holding her hands under the Chinese lanterns on the French consul's lawn.

And then, one morning at breakfast, so Ben Dearing told us, Captain Hall announced briefly that he would pull anchor at two o'clock the next afternoon for Shanghai.

"Babe Harrison was dumfounded," Ben said. "I thought for a minute that he was going to remonstrate with the Old Man about leaving. He seemed somehow to have got it into his silly head that the *Orion* was a permanent fixture in Elizabethpol Bay, and that life for him had become one long blissful evening of love-making on bungalow verandas.

"The hardest part of it was, sir, that the next day happened to be the American Thanksgiving Day, and the foreign residents had planned a jangle that was going to outdo anything ever seen on the beach. The big American girl was depending heavily on the Babe, not only as her partner for the day, but to assist her in the preparations. She had laid out the whole coming day for him. In the morning they were to motor into the country to gather Siberian laurel and spruce-boughs. In the afternoon they were to decorate the Swedish Mission schoolroom, where the jamboree was to be held. There was to be five o'clock dinner, with nothing lacking but the cranberry sauce, and afterward hours and hours of dancing and love-making.

"And the *Orion* was to pull out at two o'clock!

"Babe passed up the rest of his breakfast and went to the bridge, where I found him ten minutes later.

" 'I think I'll jump ship,' he says savagely.

" 'Sure,' I jeered. 'I think that Philadelphia girl would admire you all the more for that.'

" 'Go to ——!' says he.

"I never knew him to be so peeved over anything.

" 'Oh, I'll find some way to stay,' he adds, and goes ashore.

"Old 'Fudge' Meekin—that's the first officer, sir—looked after him and said—

" 'Well, I wonder now.'

"Well, the Philadelphia girl was fine about it. Sorry as she was, she understood, she said, and it was perfectly all right, and Captain Hall was a black pirate, and anyway they could motor out together for the laurel. She and her brother were going to run down to Shanghai when it was cooler down there, and they would all meet again in a few weeks; and after they got back with the laurel the next day Babe kissed her nineteen good-bys, I suppose, and had to run for it to catch the last boat to the ship. He was angelic to us all when he came aboard, and I began to worry about him. I'd rather have him damn me than call me 'Mister' to my face.

"We were picking up the bow anchor, sir, when something snapped, and the chain flashed across the deck and disappeared through the hawse-hole.

" 'What *is* the matter down there?' the skipper roared.

" 'We've lost the anchor, sir,' I said. 'The chain parted.'

" 'The chain parted, you say? That's impossible, you know. It's a comparatively new chain,' he says.

"Then he tells me to let go the port anchor

and man a boat to drag for the lost anchor.

"They grappled for two hours and found nothing. You see, sir, before we got the port anchor down, the ship slewed around with the tide and moved out a bit, and it was very difficult to say where the anchor lay. I thought it might be under the ship, but I didn't say so because I began to see some pleasant complications. If we hunted for that anchor long enough, and then had to send to the beach for a new one, the captain might delay sailing till the next morning, and I was as anxious as Babe Harrison was to take in the Thanksgiving soirée.

"I knew the old man wouldn't run down that wicked coast without two bow anchors, and we hadn't a spare one on board. He's a man of strong principles, sir, and one of them is, the folly of tempting Providence. I've heard him say:

" 'The man who takes chances at sea is a fool, and when he gets into trouble he thinks Providence has wronged him. No, sir, I don't believe God condones shiftlessness.'

"Our skipper can tell you a lot about the ways of Providence, sir.

"All the time we were dragging the bay for that elusive anchor, the Old Man leaned out from the bridge and called us names, and said how he was going to keelhaul that chandler down in Chi-fu who had sold him the chain; and finally he orders the crew aboard and says he's going ashore.

"Well, the Old Man goes direct to the harbormaster's office—to consult him about getting an anchor, I suppose—and the two of them empty a few glasses of vodka, and the skipper sends back word that he isn't going to sail till morning, and everybody goes ashore except three or four of the crew and Fudge Meekin, and Babe says that Providence has listened to his prayers, though what he meant by that, sir, you'll have to tell me.

"Then the skipper and his Bolshevist friend saunter down the beach to the red-headed blacksmith's, and the harbormaster tells the smith that his friend the captain wants an anchor forged in a hurry. Red Vladimir says he can't make one under three weeks, and the skipper shakes his head and says he can't wait that long, and isn't there a ship's chandler in the place? The harbormaster says no, but then Vladimir speaks up and says there's a junk-shop at the other end of the town, and maybe the Chink who runs it has an anchor.

"So the skipper and the Bolshevist and the blacksmith all trot over to the junk-shop and try to buy an anchor. Chinkie says no got, and the harbormaster spits some Russian at him, and Red Vladimir has his little say, and finally the Chink goes into the back yard and begins tumbling around a ton or two of old iron, and finally turns up the queerest thing in an anchor you ever batted an eye on, a real antique, worth a price to the British Museum.

"The harbormaster and the skipper look it over and laugh for a long while over the find, and the skipper shakes his head and says it won't do at all, and hadn't the ironmonger a twentieth century model to show him? The reeking Bolshevist spits some more Russian at the chink, and the two of them go away again, and the skipper goes back to the ship, where old Fudge told him that the anchor chain had been filed to the breaking-point.

"The skipper went forward to examine it. And the link *had* been filed, sir—cut almost in two. I saw it myself.

" 'So we lose an anchor,' says old Fudge, 'and the young men will eat that Thanksgiving dinner after all. Quite a coincidence, sir.'

" 'What do you mean by that?' the Old Man barks.

" 'Nothing, nothing, sir,' says old Fudge. 'I hope the young men will enjoy themselves. They were awf'ly cut up over the prospect of leaving port today.'

"I think he wanted to tell the Old Man what he had heard Babe say about finding a way to stay for the party, but was afraid to.

" 'You do mean something, and there's been dirty work here, and I am going to the bottom of it,' the skipper says, and calls the bosun and goes ashore.

"He picks up the harbormaster, and all three of them go to the junkman's iron-dump.

" 'It's an almost obsolete type of anchor,' the skipper says, 'but I dare say it has held many a good ship in its day, and will hold mine. Beggars must not be choosers,' he says, 'and I wonder how much that Manchurian Jew will want for it. I can't go to sea with only one bower.'

"So the harbormaster wrangles with the Chink a while, sir, and beats him down to fourteen million rubles or so, and the skipper pays, and the Manchu puts the relic on his

wheelbarrow and trundles it down to where the dingey lies, and the bosun rows it out to the ship.

" 'There,' says the skipper. 'I can go to sea now with a clear conscience, and there's a good mooring-anchor in your bay if you can find it.'

"Well, sir, Babe Harrison and I never heard anything about the Catherine Plate till that night when we were resting between dances at the Swedish Mission school. An Englishman asked us what the *Orion* was waiting in harbor for. Very few ships called there, he said, except the one or two that made regular trips from the China coast ports.

"We told him we didn't know what the captain had been waiting for, but that we would have been on our way by then if it hadn't been for a lost bower anchor.

" 'Then you didn't come for Prince Carol's gold plate?' he said; and when we asked him to explain he told us what he knew about it, all on the Q. T., as he said, because with so many Soviet spies around it wasn't safe to talk about it even.

"He said the prince had already sent one or two ships to get the gold, but they had failed. We laughed at him and said that whatever the skipper had come for to Elizabethpol it wasn't for Prince Carol's fortune in gold.

"But when Babe and I were returning to the ship that night we got to speculating about the Catherine Plate and wondering if after all that was what the skipper had come up there for. If it was, it would explain lots of things we hadn't understood—like his going there at all, his waiting there, and his chumming around with that sputtering Bolshevist.

"But pshaw! That Englishman said the gold would weigh a good quarter of a ton, and we knew nothing like that had been carried out to the *Orion*. It couldn't have got past the Soviet guards, who, we learned later, had examined every basket of provisions that cookie took out to the ship.

"Next morning, sir, old Fudge told me about the anchor chain being filed so it would break.

" 'Do you think Mr. Harrison knows anything about it?' he asked. That made me hot; but, shucks! I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me mad over it, so I said:

" 'Sure, he did it with his little hatchet. Now, Mr. Meekin, maybe you can tell me what he did it for.'

" 'Well,' old Fudge says, 'he knew Captain Hall's aversion to going to sea with one bower short, and there was that party, you know.'

" 'And so Mr. Harrison sat up all night filing that link,' I said.

" 'Mind you,' says he, 'I'm not saying he filed it, Mr. Dearing. But a man can get anything done for money.'

" 'See here, Mr. Meekin,' I said, 'a man who suspects Babe Harrison of having a hand in any such dirty work as that isn't above doing it himself.'

" 'What do you mean by that?' he says, getting warm under the collar himself.

" 'The worst you can take out of it,' I told him.

"He glared at me for a minute and walked away.

"I told Babe about it because I thought he ought to know. He was furious. 'But what can I do about it?' he says. 'Of course, if Old Fudge says anything to me about it I'll know what to do with him; but I can't go to the Old Man and deny something I haven't been openly accused of.'

" 'Forget it!' I said. 'The Old Man doesn't connect you with it, or you would have heard from him.'

"And here we are, sir," Ben Dearing concluded, "back in Shanghai, and looking for a cargo, I suppose. And you really think the Old Man went up there after that gold? Because I know jolly well he didn't get it."

"I know he went up there after it," Legren said. "And he promised us he would bring back the Catherine Plate with him."

"Well, I'm betting he got stung."

"I wouldn't put up much money on that chance," Mose said; and, pulling a piece of canvas away from the wall, he uncovered an old-fashioned anchor. "Ever see that before?" he asked.

"My word, yes," Ben Dearing laughed. "That's the skipper's starboard bower. Did he give it to you as a souvenir?"

"Mighty valuable souvenir," Legren said, and, picking up a letter-opener, he scraped a bit of paint from one of the flukes. "See that yellow?" he asked. "That anchor is solid gold."

"My word and all! And that anchor was lying down there in the bow for any one to take. Say, how was it done?"

"Well, Captain Hall will never tell us

probably; but from what I've learned from you, and the little the captain did drop, it was about this way: When Captain Hall first called on that red-headed blacksmith he showed him the shilling token, and when the two of them were on the *Orion's* deck alone the smith filed the link of the anchor chain. And then probably they cooked up the scheme of casting the gold bars into this old-fashioned anchor. Probably the Chink junkman helped the blacksmith do that. He would have facilities for melting metals, and the smith could make the mold.

"Later, you remember, the captain went first to the smith in search of an anchor, and then the smith went with him to the junkshop, probably to tip off the Chinaman that Hall was the man to whom the golden anchor was to be sold. Well, Captain Hall said he would get the gold, and he made good."

"My word and all!" Ben Dearing exclaimed again. "Say, do you mind, sir, if I bring Babe Harrison up here? He'll want to see that funny anchor again."

And without waiting for an answer Ben Dearing, second officer of the *Orion*, dashed from the office.

SPOTTED TAIL TALKS DUTCH

by F. H. Huston

AT THE time Spotted Tail's band were removed to the old Ponca Reservation they went reluctantly and consented only when shown a letter from Hayt, the Indian Commissioner to Gen. Crook, giving authority for the Ogallalas to return to their own country later in the following Spring.

In April they became restless, but were advised by Crook, who had the confidence of every Indian of all tribes, to be patient.

In May Hayt, typical official of his time, came out to see Red Cloud and Spotted Tail and induce them—or rather order them—to remain where they were, unaware that the Ogallalas were, as it may be said, the Irish of the Plains tribes and had here about four thousand well-armed warriors.

Talk succeeded talk; delay followed delay; nothing was done until at a Great Council Hayt rose and told the assemblage that he had resolved to keep them on the Ponca Reserve and went on platitudinizing until interrupted by Tail—the greatest discourtesy an Indian could show at a Council.

With a stride he was in front of Hayt, shaking the latter's letter under his nose.

"Shut up. All white men liars but the Gray Fox (Crook). Washington men big —— liars, bald-head ones worst of all.

"I don't want to hear a word from you. You a bald-head old liar, worst of any. You no talk; you make talking leaf we go back to White Clay Creek without war with the Long Knives.

"Last year you speak with this talking leaf we go back when grass green.

"I don't care for you.

"I don't care for the Long Knives.

"You big —— bald-head, no-scalp old liar.

"You make now-now—not by in by but right now—new talk leaf to the Gray Fox we go back now.

"If everything is not on wheels in ten days my young men will tear down and burn everything in this part of the country."

Hayt, realizing that four thousand of the best and most turbulent warriors of the Sioux were not to be trifled with, trembling like a leaf himself, livid from fear and licking his parched lips, hurriedly wrote the order and handed it to Tail, who stood uncompromisingly before him.

The chief took it and handed it to Crook with an interrogation upon his countenance. Crook glanced at it, nodded and made the sign for travel. Tail turned, glared at Hayt, spat on the ground at the latter's feet and stalked out of the Council, every move, every motion, expressing his disgust and contempt.

THE LAST MATCH

by John Beames

IF A MAN have a rotten spot on his soul, let him hide it in the uncleanness of cities. Let him not tempt the North, for the North strips souls naked as on the Day of Judgment.

It was six o'clock on a January morning, and the long twilight that precedes the dawn in those latitudes would not begin for an hour yet. But the pale green dancers of the north still flickered faintly in the sky, and the snow had a ghostly light of its own, so that it was by no means pitch dark under the ranked spruces. Three teams came jingling slowly down the freight trail bound for the Hudson's Bay post at Heron Lake, a hundred and sixty long, heart-breaking miles to the north.

First came a team of rusty blacks, long legged and wiry, old veterans of the trail. They drew a freight rack, three by fourteen feet, piled high with miscellaneous boxes and bales, trade goods for the post. Behind it walked, or rolled, the driver, a man of gigantic proportions, clothed in a tattered, black cowhide coat, hanging to his knees, a greasy cloth cap with earflaps, and moccasins. There was a three weeks' growth of grizzled beard on his weatherbeaten face, and his frosty blue eyes were set in a network of humorsome wrinkles. This was the great Bill Slater, old-timer, breaker of new trails in the wilderness, and the strongest man in all the North.

At his heels plodded a fleabitten gray and dark roan, short-bodied, powerful beasts but a trifle too heavy for the work. They drew a heavy load of flour; precious stuff that sells for fabulous prices in prime furs up under the Arctic circle. Their owner and driver, lean, cat-footed and tireless, was Duncan Ross, sometime of Dumfries, with the quaint dialect of his native heath still on his tongue though twenty years in the land of the beaver. His garb was a black tam-o'-shanter, and a worn fur coat of brown dog.

Last came a team of chubby and pampered sorrels, with rolls of sleek, grass-fed fat on their ribs that the grim trail would soon sweat off them. Their load was light, and they played with it wantonly in their ignorance, while their owner, little, pop-eyed Luke Snow, wondered why the teams ahead did not set a better pace. But he and his horses were new to the freight trail, and all three had very much to learn and great tribulation to undergo. Luke's corduroy sheepskin-lined coat was new, and his cap a jaunty affair of black lambskin.

The day was uneventful. The temperature was barely at zero, which is mild weather for January in the North, and the sleighs purred softly to the snow, while the sleighbells rang out clear and musical. They stopped for dinner at Muskrat Portage, crossed Billycan Lake, and camped for the night on the farther shore.

Luke, who suffered under the illusion that he was a wit, a belief that had earned him bad friends in plenty in his short life, gibed at his comrades incessantly. He was foolish enough to compare their hard-bitten, ragged looking horses with his own pudgy team, and to make the comparison in terms that more than once roused the fiery Bill to the point of an explosion. But the Scotchman took the offensive words and the more offensive cackle that followed them with a resigned lift of his shoulders.

After supper, as they lay back on their blankets in the firelight, while Ross smoked his pipe and Bill expectorated tobacco juice into the flames, Luke took up the thread of his discourse again.

"You old mossbacks thought you'd throw a scare into me with all your talk about hard trips. Ain't much hard about this, is there? Fine weather, good trails, fat horses. Mine are anyway. I guess you couldn't get any fat on your old crowbaits if you tried." And so on.

Weatherwise Bill Slater looked up at the cloudless, starlit sky, and shook his huge head.

"Maybe so, maybe so," he said quietly. "But it looks to me as if you'll be wantin' to crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after you in a few days' time if this weather holds. Eh, Dunc?"

"Aye," said the Scot, "I'm thinkin' she'll be cauld the morns' morn."

"Aw, tell that to Sweeney," gibed Luke in his callow wisdom, and the others lapsed into silence.

Bill was swiftly justified of his prediction, for when he poked his nose out of the warm blankets a little after five the next morning, the horses were stamping with the cold, and the frost darted sharp needles into his nostrils. He did not need to look at a watch, for though it was still dark he knew by the instinct of the seasoned freighter that it was time to get up.

Accordingly he took his fur coat, which he had used as a pillow, slipped it on, and stood up fully dressed, and wakening the echoes with his mellow roar of:

"Daylight in the swamp, lads. This is the weather that grows whiskers on your granddad's bald head."

Ross was on his feet at once, struggling into his coat, but Luke did not stir.

Bill nudged him, none too gently, with his toe, and he grunted sleepily, "Wassa matter?"

"Roll out there, you sawed-off little runt, and go tend your horses."

Luke sat up, and his narrow shoulders hunched themselves as the cold smote them.

"Ugh, it's cold," he gurgled with chattering teeth.

"Cold, nothin'," answered the big freighter. "Wait till the smoke freezes before you begin to blat about the cold. This is just nice Fall weather."

Luke got up very reluctantly, and stumbled off with Bill to feed the horses, while Ross lit the fire and prepared breakfast. They ate huge lumps of pork, fried and swimming in its own grease, and bannock, the flat, biscuitlike bread of the North, and drank a dark and pungent brew, tasting strongly of woodsmoke, and boiled in a sooty tin pail without a cover, which they called tea.

When the horses had been fed, they hitched up and crossed the portage where Billycan Lake empties in a series of short falls and boiling rapids into the Sucre River. Day was breaking as they swooped down the bank on to the Sucre below the rapids, and Bill turned to Luke:

"Here you are, old Mr. Know-it-all. Look at her. Cut banks, glare ice, rocks, and the —— water runnin' every which way. See if she don't get in some dirty work before you're through with her. I been over her 'bout a hundred times, and every last one of 'em she played some new hellery on me."

"Aw, you can't scare me," replied the little man, though he stared doubtfully at the uninviting prospect.

THE Sucre is perhaps the meanest river in the North, and that is saying something. It is all of a hundred yards wide, but nowhere, save in the eddies, is it more than four feet deep. Indeed, it is so shallow that in places it freezes to the very bottom in severe weather, and then the imprisoned waters smash their way through with irresistible force and run wild on top of the ice, building ridges and hummocks of glare ice that are often hollow, and form deadly traps for the unwary.

But it is the only path through the wilderness, for on either hand rise steep banks, and beyond them is a country of low, ragged hills, densely wooded, and strewn with ice-worn boulders of the glacial epoch. There is never a trail on the Sucre for long

at a time, and every party of freighters has to make its own.

Bill, by virtue of his expert knowledge of the treacherous stream, acted as guide and led them down the right bank for some miles, working his way in and out among the rocks and ice hummocks. On their left the turbulent yellow current roared and tossed, sending up a light, chilling mist into the frozen atmosphere.

In time the water disappeared altogether under a bridge of ice, and Bill called a halt.

"We'll have to get across some place," he said, "unless she comes up again on the same side. Better camp, while I go down and see what she's doin'."

So they camped, built a fire, and ate, until Bill came back with the news that they must cross within the next three hundred yards, for the ice was all rotten and full of open leads below that. He took a big drink of the scalding tea, ate some bannock and, while the others hitched up, went back with his ax to sound the ice for a safe crossing.

It was perilous work, for it is dangerous to get wet when the temperature is thirty degrees below zero, and he went very cautiously, pecking at the ice in front of him at every step. He was half-way across, when without warning a large section of the flimsy arch collapsed almost under his feet. The water leaped into the air at once like a savage beast from its den, crunching and smashing and pounding at the wallowing floes until it had swept the channel clear, pushing the pieces like so many playing cards under that portion of the bridge which still held.

Bill saved himself only by a backward leap surprizing in one of his bulk, and turned with a cheerful grin—

"Pretty near got a wash six months ahead of time," he shouted back above the roar of the water, and turned unconcernedly to his task again.

Luke felt some of his assurance evaporate, and changed color, but Ross only grinned and nodded appreciatively.

Bill found a safe-appearing crossing in time, and came back for his team. Luke was next in line, and prepared in fear and trembling to follow him over.

"Bide a wee," said the canny Scot, laying a hand on his arm. "Maybe he'll fa' in and droon."

"My God, is it as dangerous as that?" gasped Luke.

"Ye canna tell what'll happen on the Sucre," was the cautious reply.

Luke turned to watch the slowly moving sleigh in breathless suspense. The ice cracked under its weight with reports like pistol shots, and in one place it sank until the water bubbled up and over it, but still it bore. And then there was a crash as of a thousand pieces of glass shattered at a blow, and the rear end of the rack disappeared in a smother of foam. Bill leaped sideways from the doubletrees and landed on firm ice.

Not for a moment did he lose his presence of mind, and they could hear his thunderous voice bellowing encouragement to his straining team.

"Steady, boys. Howk her out. Both together now. Steady."

The force of the current held the sleigh as in a vise for a minute but the seasoned old blacks, finding firm footing under them, laid themselves sturdily into their collars and hung.

Inch by inch they drew the load up out of the water until it was safe, and then Bill checked the blown beasts, and went to their heads with rewarding words of praise and affectionate pats and caresses.

"Now what're we goin' to do?" asked Luke, with a woeful glance at the ribbon of tossing foam that separated them from their companion.

"Aweel, sin' Bill's no drooned, we'll see if we can mak' it too wi'oot gettin' oor feet wat," answered Ross coolly, and turned to his horses—

"Donal'! Rod! Coom awa' wi' ye."

They worked down river until they found a place where the ice bore, and Ross got safely across, and called back to Luke to follow. But the little man was in misery. The rotten spot in his soul was beginning to show up—

"I'm scared," he wailed.

"A' richt," cried the Scot. "If ye're feared, ye'd best get awa' hame. Bill and me's for Heron Lake."

He clucked to his team.

"Wait," yelled Luke. "I'm coming."

He put his fat sorrels at the bridge on the run, lashing them with the free ends of the lines, and screaming—

"Get up, get up, get up!"'

He had the lightest team and the lightest load of the three and his danger was negligible, but in spite of the cold the sweat was pouring down his forehead when he reached

the other side. Ross gave him a contemptuous grin, and without a word headed his horses in Bill's direction.

As they approached they could hear the big man raising his voice in what might have been a prayer of thanksgiving, but emphatically was not. He seemed to be addressing the Deity in connection with the grub-box, over which the ever hungry Sucre was at the moment licking its chops and chuckling in derision.

"By the bald-headed, old, blue-eyed, pink-whiskered Moses," lamented Bill. "All the tea, all the sugar, all the butter, half the bannock, and a big chunk of pork, all gone to ——! Stinkin' fish—and the matches!"

Then, catching sight of Luke's dejected countenance—

"Cheer up, pie-faced Pete, the human doughnut, the coyotes'll get you yet."

Luke was strangely subdued, and answered never a word, but Ross took the news with philosophic calm.

"Aye," he said, "it's bad. But it micht have been much worse."

They camped three miles down and Bill took up a match collection. Ross was able to produce eight, while Bill, who chewed but did not smoke, could only dig up four that looked as if they would light. Luke, who did not use tobacco in any form, swore that he had not a match on him.

"Now you see what not usin' tobacco does to a man," said Bill sententiously. "If we was all like you, we'd be headed for —— right now with frost in our whiskers."

He put the twelve precious matches carefully away in an inside pocket. Luke's lip curled in an ugly snarl, but he said nothing.

They missed the grub-box keenly, for they now had nothing but their jack-knives to eat with, and their only remaining utensils were the skillet and the billy can. Next to the matches their heaviest loss was the tea. Anybody who has had to drink melted snow knows what a flat, insipid, disgusting liquid it is.

"For the love of Pete," groaned Bill, taking a mouthful of the stuff and spitting it out, "this hog swill'll kill me. Somebody put mud in it to make it look like tea anyway."

The temperature had been falling steadily all day, and there was now no question of camping comfortably for the night, for the horses suffered cruelly with the cold as soon as they cooled off, in spite of two heavy blankets apiece. Unless the weather broke, which was unlikely for two or three days, they would have to pull and camp, pull and camp, day and night alike until they reached their destination.

THE short Winter day was almost at an end when they set out again. And now they found the Sucre had played them one of the dirtiest of its many dirty tricks. Half a mile from their last camp they came on a gray-blue expanse of ice jelly that covered the river from bank to bank. The water was oozing up through cracks in the ice, freezing as it came, and the resultant slush was from three inches to a foot in depth. Over it hung a clammy, choking fog to a height of eight or ten feet.

Swearing soulfully, Bill and Ross climbed on to their racks, and the two veteran teams squashed steadily ahead into the mist. But Luke's untried sorrels balked and he whimpered that he could not get them to go on.

"Come on or go back, or go to blazes," roared Bill. "We got no time to be dry-nursin' you and your pussy-footed shoats."

The fog shut down behind him.

"Wait, for God's sake wait," wailed Luke, and the sorrels, like their master, afraid and lonely, whinnied plaintively. One of Ross' beasts answered them out of the mist, and forgetting their fear of the slush, they plunged in and soon caught up.

The going was better than might have been expected, for the sleighs slipped easily through the sludge, and the water, coming up comparatively warm from below, kept the horses' feet from freezing; though whenever they reached dry ice, the men had to jump off and run to wipe off their legs, to keep the ice from caking on their fetlocks.

But there was deadly danger nevertheless. In the dark and the fog the men could see nothing distinctly, and Bill wisely gave his sage old blacks their heads. Once they swung sharply to the right, and the sleigh slid past a black and bubbling hole in the ice from which the water boiled with a low hissing noise.

They refused a firm-looking piece of glare ice, and when Luke, thinking himself wiser than they, tried to put his team upon it, it shivered at the first touch of a hoof, and all but let the sorrels in for a ducking. Luke followed his leader very faithfully after that.

All through that awful night they pulled over alternate fields of slush and glare-ice,

camping twice for three-hour periods. Daybreak found them, men and horses alike, all but worn out, and coated with white frost from head to foot where the mist had frozen on them.

But at last the river trail came to an end, and they prepared to pull up the bank on their way across the long portage that runs from the Sucre, to the head of the long chain of swamps and meres that are all lumped under the name of Heron Lake.

Even with two teams on each sleigh it was all the jaded horses could do to climb out of the riverbed.

And now they found themselves on a different kind of trail, just as bad in its way as the Sucre. Down there it was glare-ice, holes, fog and slush; up here it was hairpin twists among rocks and trees, with short climbs that were like the side of a house, followed by downward pitches where the sleighs tried to overrun the horses. Moreover, the trail was so narrow that the racks were perpetually scraping on one side or the other, and in instant danger of being wrecked.

About four in the afternoon, on the very edge of night, they reached the height of land and Bill checked his team.

"One at a time," he said. "She's half a mile straight down and a —— bender of a curve at the bottom. We'll camp at the bubbling spring that's a little piece down the trail after you hit the level. You, Luke, you never been over this trail before, so mind what I tell you. Hold 'em all you know goin' down, and get ready to 'gee' like —— when she swings. If you don't, she'll cut off and bust the rack, and maybe your head too, on the big stump."

Luke gazed down the twisting white ribbon that glimmered pale between the trees, and his heart grew sick within him. Bill looked carefully to the breeching of his team before he climbed into his place, braced his feet against the runners, and whistled to his horses. They started off cautiously, toeing in like the wise old-timers they were and keeping their quarters well under them. But half-way down the strain proved too much and they began to trot. The last Luke saw of them was a black blot dropping like a plummet, while the high scream of the tortured runners floated back to him, mingled with the mad clashing of the sleighbells. Sound and sight failed together, and the brooding hush of the mid-Winter wild came down like a blanket.

Luke shivered.

"Do you think he made it?" he asked.

"I'm awa' doon tae see," answered the Scot noncommittally. "Don't ye crowd me, noo. Bide here till I'm weel oot o' sicht, and mind what Bill telled ye aboot geein' when ye get tae the turn."

Then he, too, swept down into the night and the silence.

Luke waited for many long minutes after the last faint jingle of the bells had died away. He was cold, he was tired, he was frightened, and big tears of self-pity gathered in his prominent blue eyes, and froze upon his grimy cheeks. He was for giving up and sitting down to die. But his team was of another mind, and whinnying shrilly they began to move off down the slope.

"Whoa," cried Luke. "Whoa there."

But they only broke into a trot.

With a despairing bleat, he plunged after them. Racing madly, he clutched at the tail of the rack and dragged himself on board. Then he began to crawl cautiously forward, while the sleigh leaped madly under him and the sorrels galloped for dear life. Lying flat on his stomach, he got his hands on the lines and hauled with all his might. But all he was able to do was to bring the horses back on their haunches, and even that hardly checked their way. In a cloud of powdery snow, with the horses tobogganning on their tails and the sleigh trying to run up their backs, they reached the bend.

Luke caught a glimpse of a huge figure gesticulating through the enveloping whirl of snow, heard a thunderous shout of: "Gee there, Gee!" and immediately thereafter came a splintering crash and he was hurled into the air.

The sleigh had cut off the trail at the turn, as Bill had predicted, and the rear end of the rack had been snapped off against a stump. The horses were piled in a struggling heap, and Luke, after looping the loop gracefully, came to rest on his head in four feet of snow. Bill promptly dived in after him, while Ross threw himself on the plunging team.

"Are you hurt?" cried Bill, hauling Luke to his feet.

"I—I don't think so," stammered Luke, gasping and pawing the snow out of his eyes.

"Huhn," grunted Bill. "Drunk men and fools never do get hurt; I might have

knowed that. Come on out, then, and see what's happened to your outfit. Looks as if it was all smashed to blazes. You're some teamster, you are."

"They got away on me," whined Luke. "I couldn't hold 'em."

"Oh, go away and sit down," snapped Bill. "Now we got to turn to and fix up some kind of rack, and you'd only be in the road."

BY THIS time Ross had got the sorrels on their feet, and the party moved down the road to where a cheerful fire crackled beside a spring that remained unfrozen in the coldest weather. Here they found the off-sorrel had a cut below the knee, but otherwise the team seemed none the worse for their tumble.

They ate, and then Bill bade Luke keep a good fire and bring the horses as close to it as possible, while he and Ross went back to patch up the old rack or build a new one, as occasion might require. As it happened, they had practically to make a new rack, and that under the most unfavorable conditions.

Yet, though they worked with numb and fumbling hands in the dark and the intense cold, their only light a flickering fire, by two o'clock in the morning the two veterans had contrived something that would at least carry a load, and had piled Luke's scattered freight upon it.

Both men were in that condition of intense irritability which follows close on great fatigue when they got back to the horses, only to find Luke placidly asleep under all the blankets he could find, the fire almost out, and the horses stamping and shivering with the cold. Then and there Ross' long suffering patience snapped, and he went to work on Luke with speed and certainty.

The little man woke to find an iron-hand on the back of his neck and his face being rubbed in the snow. He opened his mouth to howl and found it filled with snow. Feeling himself in the very jaws of death, he began to fight with the panic fury of a cornered rat. Freeing himself with a final frantic twist, he sprang to his feet and vanished in the darkness with a bubbling howl, while Bill collapsed in a limp heap and bayed the vault of heaven with Homeric laughter. But Ross' nostrils were twitching and there was no mirth in his eyes.

"Man," he growled. "It's nae lau hin' matter. Yon's no guid eneuch to be hanged, and I'll dae him a mischief yet if he's no verra carefu'."

"What's eatin' him," whimpered Luke in the shadow. "What was the use of me stayin' up? The fire isn't out."

Ross growled deep in his throat, but Bill cried:

"Oh, come on to the fire, you poor yellow pup. He won't hurt you now."

"He better not try it," sniffed Luke, and sidled up on the far side of the fire, with a wary eye on the Scot, who disdained to notice him.

They ate again, for a man is always hungry on the freight trail, and then Bill said he must have a couple of hours sleep or go mad. So he and Ross curled up in their blankets, taking the precaution to appropriate Luke's too, leaving Luke to tend the fire. Bill admonished him with blood-curdling threats to keep it roaring all the time, and to waken them at six sharp. But it was the cold glint in the Scot's eye that made Luke obey his orders to the letter, for a really angry man of that nation is cousin to the earthquake and half-brother to the cyclone.

They pulled out before seven in a temperature that was somewhere around sixty below zero and cold at that, and until the dawn ground and bumped over the unspeakable trail. Luke's injured sorrel limped painfully at setting out, but gradually limbered up. They camped a little after sunrise on the margin of one of the outlying arms of Heron Lake, a reedy swamp, full of muskrat houses, and ringed about with mournful black spruce trees.

Bill found that they had now only seven matches, and shook his head over them.

"These'll never get us to the post," he said. "We got seventy good miles to go, and the horses is so played out we can't pull more'n five miles at a time without campin'. We'll have to take and punch holes in Luke's pail, and make a fire bucket."

Luke had maintained a sullen silence since they broke camp that morning, and now he spoke up in sullen rancor.

"I'll be —— if you do. Use your own pail or Dunc's. What do you always want to pick on me for? You done nothin' else, both of you, since we started. I wouldn't give neither of you a drink of dirty water if you was dyin' for it. That's all the chance you have of gettin' my pail."

The rotten spot in his soul was becoming pretty clearly defined.

"He's a generous laddie, yon," said Ross with a dry chuckle.

"Well, why don't you use your own pail for a fire bucket?" snapped Luke.

"Sure, put a fire in our *wooden* pails," agreed Bill softly. "They'd make dandy fire buckets—while they lasted."

"Well, you ain't goin' to have mine," said Luke obstinately. "I ain't the one what drownded the grub-box."

Bill's weatherbeaten face flushed a brick-red, and his eyes glinted dangerously. But Ross interposed.

"Let be," he said. "The lad was born a fule, and canna help himsel'."

"That's a fact," agreed Bill, and turned his back on Luke.

As the day drew on, the pale sunshine moderated, or seemed to moderate, the cold a great deal, though it did little in reality. It is the long, glimmering nights that make the cold so hard to bear in the North, and the slanting, golden rays wiped much of the need of sleep from the tired eyes of men and horses. The trail followed the shore line pretty closely, and they were able to pull in to the bank every few miles and rest and eat. But the night came all too swiftly, and then they crept like creatures in a nightmare across the frozen waste.

As they prepared to break camp a little before midnight, with only four matches left, Bill asked Luke a second time for his pail, and a second time he was flatly refused.

"All right," said Bill. "I'll let you have it this time, but I'm goin' to have it next stop, if I have to break your worthless neck to get it."

The lake had now widened considerably, and the trail led straight out across the ice, not to touch the shore again for some five miles. None of the men remember clearly what happened from this time on. They have glimpses of incidents, but most of it is an uneasy, groaning blank. The weather gave signs of breaking, for a few tiny wisps of cloud trailed slowly across the sky, wherein the cold stars looked down with mocking, evil eyes on their torment. A dying moon, low down on the horizon, sent a few pale rays across the level, gray-white expanse, and a razor-edged wind rose and wandered aimlessly about, smiting like a fanged snake at the exposed faces of the men.

It seemed to them that the ice tilted and rolled under them in long, sickening heaves, and strange, formless creatures ran about and gamboled on the ice. All about them was an absolute stillness. Not even a coyote howled or an owl hooted. In some curious way the sleighbells seemed to have fallen mute, and the cold stilled the grinding of the runners on the gritty snow to a feeble whining and cheeping.

The tired horses would drag the sleighs a hundred yards or so, and come to a stop with drooping heads. Then the cold would bite mercilessly through their frost covered coats, and they would wince and move on. Bill's grand old blacks set the pace for they were the strongest. Ross' fleabitten gray was dragging a hind foot on account of a tender hock, and Luke's lame sorrel stumbled pitifully.

The men walked, keeping in the lee of their racks to avoid the wind as much as possible, for it was too cold to ride and every extra pound the horses were made to draw told heavily.

THREE-FIFTHS of the way across, Bill noticed that Luke's team had not moved on with the others. He shouted, but getting no reply, turned back to see what the matter was. The sorrels were standing shoulder to shoulder, their hanging heads nearly touching the snow, and Luke was not in sight. Bill shouted again, and stared about him until his eyes rested upon a black blot in the snow a few yards away. It was Luke, lying upon his face like one already dead.

Bill bent with fear in his heart, and shook him.

"Leave me alone," mumbled Luke. "I want to go to sleep. I've quit."

This was serious, for when a man lies down in the snow and gives up, the end is usually not far off. But Bill was a man of resource.

"Get up," he roared, and jarred the recumbent figure with a hearty kick. Luke groaned and rolled over, only to receive another kick.

"Here, hi, don't you do that again," he protested, sitting up. "Why can't you leave me alone? I'm warm now, and sleepy; my God, I'm sleepy. You leave me be. I'm goin' to sleep, if I never wake up."

But Bill only plied his feet the harder. They were well muffled in socks and moccassins, so the kicks broke no bones, but every

one of them rattled every tooth in Luke's head. He scrambled up, and the amazed Ross beheld the pair coming swiftly toward him, Luke at a staggering run, while Bill, his ragged fur coat flying out behind him, progressed in a series of grotesque hops, assisting his victim onward with frequent applications of his good right foot.

"What like o' a game are ye playin' wi' the laddie?" he inquired, as Luke darted behind him for shelter, and Bill came to a breathless stop.

"The yellow pup," gasped Bill. "Ahi'tin' the hay—way out in the lake—been a stranger in —— for breakfast if I hadn't booted the daylights outer him."

Luke leant against a rack, and wept unashamed.

"I can't go on, I can't go on," he sobbed. "Let me lie down and die."

"Not by a jugful," growled Bill. "We ain't packin' no stiffs this trip. Wait till you get back home, then you can die and welcome. What you want is exercise. Here, take the ax and beat it along to the point and build a fire. We'll bring your team along. Wait."

He removed his heavy mitt, fumbled in his clothing, and brought out a single match.

"Now you take mighty good care of this match, and hustle right along, so you'll warm up. If I find you layin' down on the trail again, I'll boot you till your nose bleeds."

Luke took the match and his ax and shuffled off, sniveling, while the others got the horses under way again and followed.

As they drew in to the point they could hear his ax going steadily, but no friendly twinkle of light beckoned to them from the shore. They unhitched on the edge of the lake, blanketed the horses, piled hay before them, and went to see what Luke was doing.

"Where's the fire?" cried Bill.

"My hands was too cold, the match went out on me," replied Luke sullenly.

Bill sniffed scornfully, and dived into his wrappings for the remaining matches. He brought out the three priceless little slivers of wood, and handed one to Ross.

"You try, Dunc," he said. "My hands ain't got no feelin' to 'em."

"I'm no sae sure I hae ony hands," said the Scot with a wry grin.

He took the match clumsily between thumb and palm, for his fingers were useless, and essayed to strike it. At the second attempt it flared up, and he bent to apply it to a thin roll of birchbark. But the fire scorched through the numb cuticle of his palm, and woke a quiescent nerve to sharp agony. Before he well knew what he did, he jerked his hand back, and the match flew into the snow a yard away. He stared stupidly at his burnt hand for a moment, sighed heavily, and rose with his head hanging in shame.

"Well, it's up to me now, I guess," said Bill quickly, to cover his friend's failure, and knelt to the little pile of sticks and birchbark which Luke had gathered. They watched him anxiously, as he first beat his hands against his chest to warm them, and then picked up a match.

Once he struck—twice he struck—a third time he struck, a thought too hard. The blazing head snapped off short and fell between the sticks into the snow beneath. The three drew in their breath so that it was almost a sob.

"The last match," said Bill solemnly, holding it up to view. "If it goes we're done. It'd be comin' to Luke if it did—the lousy little shoat—him and his —— pail."

But a change had come over Luke. The wood chopping had put a little warmth in his frozen blood, and the rotten spot had spread until it had eaten up all his soul. He sneered covertly as he watched Bill.

The big man's hand trembled a little as he rubbed the match on his trousers to warm it so that it would strike easily. Then he drew it swiftly and steadily down the inside of his leg, and it flared up bravely. The birchbark caught with a greasy crackle. Bill sprang to his feet with an exultant bellow, struck his head smartly against an overhanging, snow-laden bough, and in a second their last hope was quenched in a miniature avalanche.

Bill stared dumbly at the ruin he had wrought, then turned contritely to Ross.

"I didn't go to do it, Dunc," he said huskily. "Will you forgive me?"

"Man, it was no your faut," was the ready reply, and the Scot's hand went out. Under the lifted sword of death they gripped hands, for they were both strong men and true comrades.

Luke said nothing.

"We'll take the horses and hit for the post. It's our only show. It's my fault for drownding the grub box and puttin' the fire out, and I'm willin' to take my

medicine, but it's tough on you and Luke. I didn't oughter brought the kid out on this trip, and him so green."

"It's nae mon's faut mair than anither," said Ross, "and we'll get the lad safe to the post if we hae to carry him."

But it appeared that Luke had other ideas.

"I'm not goin'," he said. "You can try for the post if you want to, but it's all of forty mile, according to your say-so, and you've a fat chance of makin' it."

"But, ——, you can't stay here," said Bill.

"I can so. If you make the post you can come back and get me if I'm alive. If you don't, I'll be a lot better off'n what you'll be. I'm goin' to roll up warm in the blankets and get some sleep anyway. It don't look good to me to crawl along on the ice till I fall down and die."

There was reason in what he said. He stood at least an even chance with them of life—the hope was of the faintest either way.

"Have it your own way," said Bill, after a pause. "We'll take the horses though."

"Not mine, you won't," said Luke. "They'll fall down and die on you inside twenty miles the way they are now."

There was truth in that, too, and the others acquiesced. They brought the bedding from the sleighs, and made for Luke a thick warm nest, displaying a solicitude that he should have every comfort in their power, that might have well melted the heart of any one whose soul was not hopelessly cankered.

But never a word of thanks had Luke for them, never a good wish to speed them on their way. When they had him wrapped to the chin, first Bill and then Ross shook hands with him and wished him luck. But his hand remained limp in their grasp, and Ross in particular was struck by the malignancy of his glance.

Long after they had each of them mounted one of his tired horses and, leading the other, struck out on their all but hopeless dash for the post, Ross puzzled over that look. There was hatred in it, and there was also a kind of triumph, a cruel exultation.

Suddenly he swung his horse about.

"Where're you goin'?" cried Bill.

"Back," said Ross between clenched teeth. "Yon hell-cat, I know now what he meant."

The puzzled Bill swung his horse's head obediently.

"But why?" he asked.

"I'll show you," said Ross, and urged on his horse.

They plodded along in silence until they had rounded the point, and swung back to where the sleighs lay under the bank.

"Look," said Ross, and pointed.

Bill looked and struck his heels to his horse's sides with a bellow of wrath, for the flickering light of a fire shone through the underbrush.

WHEN Luke had first refused to render up his matches, it was out of mere petty spite he had concealed their possession, but when he saw Bill's last match extinguished, a vile thought had stirred in his rotten soul like a maggot in a mass of corruption.

Without a qualm of pity he had sent his comrades, as he thought, to their death. Now he crouched over his fire and gloated in his revenge.

The heavy pounding of hoofs near at hand startled him from these pleasant musings. He sprang to his feet. Cowardice and hatred fought for the mastery of his soul. But hatred was yet the stronger. Deliberately he began to kick snow over the fire.

But he had not time to complete his task. Bill's great black came charging up, and his rider hurled himself to the ground. Bill's eyes were red and terrible, and his huge muscles like knots of iron. With a mighty swing he knocked Luke flat, pounced on him, gripped him by the throat, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

Ross was at his heels, but with the prudence of his race, he stooped at once to the all but extinguished fire.

For a moment Luke struggled feebly in the deadly grip on his throat, then his body relaxed, his head fell back. In another instant he had been a corpse. But Ross intervened. He grasped Bill's wrist.

"Haud," he cried. "Ye'll kill him."

Unwillingly Bill relaxed his grip, and Luke dropped limply at his feet—

"Why wouldn't I?" he growled.

"Because ye'll hang for it, and he's no worth it."

"Perhaps I've killed him already," said Bill, gazing down at the sprawling carcass with growing apprehension in his eyes.

But Luke stirred. Presently he was

sitting up, feeling his sore throat tenderly, a defiant scowl on his face.

Bill's eyes grew red again, and he took a step forward.

Luke flung up his arms to protect his head, and cowered.

"Don't you dare touch me," he whimpered. "I'll have you pinched. I didn't tell you —— fools to hit for the post."

Now it was the turn for the Scot's eyes to blaze.

"Shut your heid," he rasped. "Yer lookin' death in the ee."

"What'll we do to him?" asked Bill. "We got to do something."

"Listen, ye whelp," said Ross to Luke, after a moment's consideration. "From now until we get hame ye'll licht every fire, ye'll chop a' the wood, ye'll feed every horse. If ye dinna jump when the word's gi'en, if ye open your heid, pray to your God for mercy in heaven, for there'll be nane for ye on earth."

And it was so.

It was a different Luke who came back to the settlement. A Luke whose haggard face wore a yellow mask of frozen skin that peeled away in strips; a Luke who stumbled in his walk; a Luke whose eyes were filled with pain and terror and weariness, and who winced like a well-kicked cur at the lightest word from his masters.

O ye whose souls are not sound and true, tempt not the great North.

PACKET-BOATS ON THE OHIO

by **H. P.**

FROM 1794 until 1811 the best means of traveling on the Ohio river was by packet-boat. These were keel-boats, often a hundred feet long and twenty feet wide with accomodation for passengers in the stern. To aid the men with their long push poles there was a mast and sails. If the current were too swift for poling the men carried a line ashore and towed the craft up-stream.

The packets made regular trips from Louisville and Cincinnati to Pittsburg and return. The running time from Pittsburg to Cincinnati and return was a month with a few days ashore for the man making the round trip.

The introduction of the packet found the Indians still seeking to prevent any further westward expansion of the white race in the Mississippi Valley. There was the Indian peril for unprotected boats on the Ohio. In the *Cincinnati Centinel* of January 11th, 1794, appeared an advertisement, which in part states—

> The proprietors of these boats having maturely considered the many inconveniences and dangers incident to the common method hitherto adopted in navigating the Ohio, and being influenced by a love of philanthropy, and a desire of being serviceable to the public, have taken great pains to render the accommodations on the boat, etc., etc.

Passengers are assured they will be in no danger from "the enemy," the boats being rifle proof, and having "convenient port holes for firing out." In short, according to the advertisement, a patron need not even take a sporting chance, but could pot savages without ever running the risk of being damaged.

Not only did each boat carry a "good number of muskets, and amply supplied with ammunition," but each was also "manned with choice men." To insure further the traveler's safety each boat carried six pieces, "carrying a pound ball."

There was a separate cabin for women, while passengers were supplied with "provisions and liquors of all kinds, of the first quality." Those who wished to work their passage were welcome if they submitted to the same rules as governed the regular employees. One could have his goods insured at Pittsburg, Limestone, or Cincinnati. Nothing was mentioned about insuring one's life, although it is admitted in the advertisement that a landing "might at times be attended with danger."

Up-stream travel, however, was largely confined to those merchants who were permanently located on the Ohio and who had need to go to Pittsburg to arrange for fresh stocks of goods. The passenger traffic down the river was composed of those whose eyes were on the West and who had no thought of ever returning. In addition to passengers the packets did a large freight business. With the coming of the steamboat the packet vanished.

THE WARRIORS OF THE CANADIAN

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "The Passing of John Ringold," "The Warriors of the Pecos," etc.

THE Llano Estacado lay beneath the sky's blue bowl, without a bush to break its flat monotony. Horse and rider showed upon the level expanse as a mere dot; the dot crawled slowly northward and the zenith moved above it; always the same vast circle of land marked at its exact center by this speck. Only the sun changed, shifting by imperceptible degrees into the west.

A good young Texan pony, and the man was not yet twenty-five, straight as a lance in the saddle, with coal black hair and eyes of jet to which much sun-glare and long rifle practise had given a slight obliquity.

His lean form moved smoothly with the movements of the horse; it seemed to have been created for the high-heeled boots, the tight jean breeches and the sombrero with drooping rim; to have been fashioned on purpose for such trappings as the loosely hung cartridge belt and the holstered forty-five revolver. There was a fine litheness in the poise which made it harmonize completely with the fierce brown plain; an ever present suggestion of savagery held in repose.

It was a year of changes on the Llano. The buffalo had vanished; the last great herd had melted away with a suddenness that was like the passing of a morning mist in a river bottom when the sun comes up. The roving war parties of Comanches and Kiowas had retired to their reservations in the Indian Territory. And now the cattle were creeping out over the Texas Panhandle. Southward and to the east the law was appearing in regions which had heretofore been wild.

So many solitary riders were traveling across the enormous mesa which the old Spaniards had named the Staked Plains; and the majority of them were like the wild geese which flew above them, in that they knew no reason for their migration beyond the restless stirring of their blood. The chances are this was the case with Jim East. During his early twenties a man reacts to his environment according to his strength or weakness, but as a rule unconsciously.

The unmarked leagues of flat lands unrolled before him as he came on; about the edges where the bare earth met the polished sky herds of antelope appeared, to glide in silence beyond the horizon's line. The skeletons of buffalo lay strewn about his path. Prairie dogs sat rigid on their mounds regarding him in wise-eyed contemplation as he passed their villages.

Behind him lay his past, before him large events toward which he traveled all unknowingly.

*"*The Warriors of the Canadian," copyright, 1922, by F. R. Bechdolt.*

A speck upon the plain, he moved through the long day. The night came down; he camped. Other days followed; the vast surface of the earth began to change. He reached the breaks of the Canadian.

They needed a good hand at the L X ranch. Jim East unsaddled before the flat-roofed log cabins under the cottonwoods one day and "hired out," to use the good old phrase.

TASCOSA lay on the north bank of the Canadian—a few Mexican adobes down in the timbered river bottom; on the first low benchland a blacksmith shop and a general store. Two hundred and fifty miles from Dodge City and half that distance from Mobeetie, it was a landmark in the wide lands of the free grass, the meeting place of those who passed over the western reaches of the Llano. Hither came the cowboys of the L X, the Frying Pan, the L S and the L I T when work was slack, to drink the stinging whisky from the barrel in the store, to shoot at marks and, on occasion, to dance the night through at a baille down in the river bottom. And among them were the warriors of the Panhandle.

The men who had smelled powder smoke, the pick of the Southwest, winnowed by those fierce events which only the fit can survive, they had drifted into the country like Jim East to guard the far-flung herds against the dark-skinned renegades who slipped down from the reservations to the north, to battle with hard-eyed rustlers, and to cut the great bands of the drovers for their employers' brands. None of them but had killed his man or men; and scarcely one who had not, at some time or other, "swung a wide loop" himself.

Of morals in the narrow sense of the word they had no more than the cow thieves and the outlaws; and it would have puzzled any of them to tell what it was in his make-up that had kept him among the watch-dogs instead of among the wolves.

In Tascosa Jim East met them—Charley Siringo, Bob Robertson, Cal Polk, Lou Chambers, Tom Emory, Lee Hall, Frank Clifford, Bob Williams, Louis Bozeman and the rest. Dodge City knew some of them; others were among the lawless young riders who had surged through old Fort Griffin in the days of the buffalo herds; and some had left wild memories behind them down by the Rio Grande.

To Tascosa, late in the autumn of '78, there came another group of warriors from the valley of the Pecos over in New Mexico. They were camped down by the L X ranch with a bunch of horses which, they said, they had stolen from the Indians in the reservations to the north, and they were selling their ponies to the cowmen of the neighborhood.

It was a period when questions were seldom asked; these strangers might have departed leaving no knowledge of their identities behind them, had it not been that their reputations were over-large for concealment even in that careless time. For they were outlaws with prices on their heads and several of them had fought, under the long-haired boy who still led them, through the Lincoln County war.

By the clean—and in this day peculiar—code of cattle land, a man's business was his own and blood-money carried a taint with it. These men had stolen no Canadian stock; their dead lay buried behind them in another valley; and they were good companions, free with their friendship, prodigal in the bestowal of confidence. The warriors of the Panhandle met them at the little hamlet and drank with them over the unpainted bar in the general store; they shot at marks; they played monte together; they danced with the Mexican girls at bailles down in the river bottom.

The weeks went by. The outlaws of the Pecos stayed on. Jim East and his fellows fell under the spell of that ingenuous affability which made some men cling to Billy the Kid through the darkest days of his outlawry. They came to like tall Tom O'Phalliard and dark-eyed Charley Bowdre as well as they liked one another.

They drank and gambled and they danced; they bartered reminiscences of fighting days; they exchanged presents. And when the horses were sold they said good-by to these wanderers with as much feeling as they ever showed at any parting with chance comrades, which was not so much at that.

"So long," they called; and, "See you later," and no one took thought as to any chance of those last words carrying a grim prophecy.

THE seasons passed: Spring round-up and the trail herds to Dodge; the long hot days of riding in the Summertime; Fall branding and the Winter in the dug-outs by the river bank. The warriors of the Panhandle worked with their outfits meeting one another as the chances of their calling willed it on the range and about the ruddy fires by the chuck wagons. They rode over to the little settlement by the Canadian. And often when they gathered they talked—as old Virgil sang—of arms and a man.

From the long valley of the Pecos over in the west large news was borne by every traveler; the smooth-faced boy with the long hair and the two buck teeth, whom men called Billy the Kid, was riding through that country like a scourge. As the months went on, as other men hunted him and the lust to kill grew stronger within him, he slew like the rattlesnake which sometimes sounds its warning and sometimes does not, but always strikes with deadly sureness.

There were New Mexican villages where men feared to speak his name. And, wherever he rode, whether in foray or in flight, Charley Bowdre and Tom O'Phalliard rode with him. The men of the Canadian discussed his deeds. It was an era when cowboys were singing long ballads idealizing such heroes as Sam Bass and Jesse James—perhaps they minimized the darkness of the murders; and it is safe to say that they dwelt with emphasis on the audacity of some exploits. No sheriffs rode their range in those days, and one man at war against a commonwealth appealed to them.

But the cattle of the Canadian roved before the Winter winds and every Springtime found hundreds of them down in the valley of the Pecos. When the cowboys who had been sent to round up these strays in the Spring of 1880 returned they brought back word that the stock had vanished utterly.

"Rustlers," they said, and the cattlemen talked the matter over when they gathered in Tascosa that Summer.

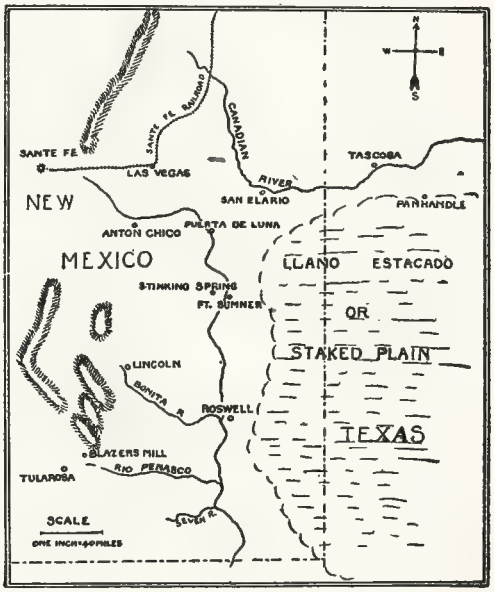
They called several of their foremen into conference.

"The Kid," one wagon boss told them. "His gang holed up at Portales lake last Spring and rounded up all the Canadian stock that drifted down that-a-way."

The cowmen of the Panhandle had worried no more than their cowboys about the Lincoln County war; and for all they cared Billy the Kid might kill as many men as he chose over on the Pecos. But when he stole their beef—that altered matters.

They sent to Lincoln for more information and learned that the band who had sold them horses in Tascosa two years before were holding several hundred of their fattest steers somewhere near Fort Sumner for a higher price. Then they assembled two crews, with a wagon boss, a cook and five men in each, to round up the cattle and the thieves.

And so it came that on the sixteenth day of November 1880 Jim East rode over to Tascosa to join his fellow warriors of the Canadian and set forth against the warriors of the Pecos whom they had come to like so well in this same place two years before.



Tascosa had grown; there were now three stores and the semblance of a street. Two wagon outfits and a dozen saddle horses gave the budding town a lively appearance on this raw windy morning. Numbers of lean-flanked young men with huge forty-five revolvers dangling from sagging cartridge-studded belts were doing their best to give the liveliness a hectic tinge.

An accordion was droning dance music; now and again there came from inside one of the adobe buildings a long wolf yell; occasionally a series of pistol shots gave staccato punctuation to the uproar. Jim East threw his pony's reins over a convenient

hitching-rack and a moment later his high boot-heels were clipping upon the board floor as he hastened to take his place in the line before the nearest bar.

All hands were here now: Charley Siringo and Bob Robertson, the two wagon bosses; Jim East, Tom Emory, Lou Chambers, Cal Polk, Lee Hall, Bob Williams, Frank Clifford and Louis Bozeman; the fighting men from the L X, the L S, the Frying Pan and the L I T; and they were taking their departure after the manner of warriors since the world began. The issue was no weight on their young minds; the question of who was right and who was wrong was not disturbing them at all.

Billy the Kid and his followers had looted their employers' herds; they thought no less of them for that and most of them cherished more than a sneaking liking for the outlaws. If any one of us had heard them on that November morning he would have wondered wherein they differed—where lay the moral gulf that separated them—from the men whom they were setting forth to kill. And for that matter there are some among them who have not been able to reason out the fine points of that little problem to this day. But they were going after those cattle and the band who held them—and if some one died, why that was all in the day's work. In the meantime life was good and the fun was blazing. They made the most of it.

They took their farewell drink and swung into their saddles. The wagons pulled out. The lithe young horsemen rode alongside toward the west.

They traveled onward through the bleak November days. They crossed the boundary into the territory of New Mexico and halted at the little hamlet of San Ilario while one of their number went on ahead to Las Vegas with five hundred dollars to buy grub. But the warrior fell afoul of a monte game and the five hundred dollars went the way that many another hundred went in those days. It is only fair to remark in passing that the unlucky gamester worked out the amount with his outfit during the next year; but in the meantime he and his companions were obliged to "go on the wolf," as the old saying has it, which means that they subsisted from the country.

It was a lean land at the best and they came to the point where they were glad to share the mutton of such sheep-herders as they encountered, which marks the cowboy's last extremity.

Bleak days and bleaker nights; and when they reached the upper valley of the Pecos they found the little adobe settlements in a state of terror. Men spoke the name of Billy the Kid in whispers, and shook their heads when they were asked for information. No one knew who was in league with the outlaws, and many told grim tales of what had happened to those who offered any help to posses. As to the cattle—they had vanished somewhere in the south.

Still they pressed onward, seeking some tidings of the steers or of the thieves; and after the fashion of their kind they jested at every misfortune, even at the one which left their bellies empty. The strength of their youth, which made them reckless, kept them hopeful; and they knew they had one ally who was biding their arrival.

"When we meet up with Pat Garret, we'll throw in with him," they said.

He was of their breed, a warrior of the Panhandle. In the days of the great bison herds he had been a buffalo hunter and had wandered westward to the valley of the Pecos in the fall of 1878 to settle in Fort Sumner. Not long after Billy the Kid refused Governor Lew Wallace's offer of pardon and turned outlaw for good and all, Pat Garret was elected sheriff of Lincoln County.

A lean man, enormously tall, with drooping lids that hid most of his eyes and a mustache curtaining his tight lips, he held his features rigidly expressionless and spoke in grudging monosyllables. He was deadly with revolver or rifle, a good tracker and dogged on the trail.

It was well along in December and they were at Llewellyn's Wells not far from Anton Chico when he saw the smoke of their fire rising among the long bare hills that flank the upper Pecos and urged his jaded pony to their camp. The wind came across the mesa biting raw. The fire flared ruddy between the covered wagons. The warriors of the Panhandle lounged within its grateful warmth, unshaven, gaunt from travel and the long lean weeks. He dismounted and stood among them, towering a head above them all; his face was like a solemn mask.

They questioned him and got the latest news in brief phrases, clipped off between tight lips. Billy the Kid was in this end

of the county with five followers. Tom O'Phalliard and Charley Bowdre were among them.

"I met up with Bowdre in Puerta de Luna a little while back," the sheriff said, "and told him you fellows were coming; he'd better quit the Kid. He said he aimed to stick."

They asked him as to the others in the band.

"Dave Rudabaugh's one. Come down from Dodge City way; fattish man with a big mustache. Killed Lopez, the jailor at Las Vegas, last Fall. There's Billy Wilson and Tom Picket. Texas boys. The bunch shot up White Oaks the other day and a mob took after 'em. Got 'em cornered at the Greathouse ranch. Jimmy Carlysle was heading the crowd. The Kid done baited him into the house and killed him. The others quit and went back to town."

He warmed himself at the fire and looked about him at their faces, solemn as a good player at a poker game. They pressed him further.

"They're over Fort Sumner way som'ers. Charley Bowdre's got a woman living there, and the Kid's stuck on a girl. I'm waiting for word. But I can't get good fighting men. If some of you fellows will throw in with me——"

Volunteers interrupted him. Charley Siringo and Bob Robertson, the wagon bosses, checked the offers.

"We got to go on and find those steers," they said. "We can give you six men, three from each wagon."

"Good fighting men," the sheriff cut in.

They gave him Jim East, Tom Emory, Lou Chambers, Lee Hall, Bob Williams and Louis Bozeman.

"We'll hit the trail for Puerta de Luna," Garret told them. "Barney Mason and Frank Stewart are waiting for me there."

Within the hour the party had split; Charley Siringo and Bob Robertson took the remainder of the wagon crews to comb down the valley of the Pecos for those missing steers. The sheriff rode away with his six men to Puerta de Luna.

THE time dragged by and no word came. One night when they were loafing in old Griselkowski's store, which maintained as a sort of annex the only bar in the place, the front door opened and a Mexican entered with a gust of Winter wind. It was evident from his garb that he was a sheep-herder and one would judge that he had ridden far. A poker game was going on in a corner of the room and Pat Garret was among the players. The man came straight to him and said something in an undertone. The sheriff pushed back his chair.

"It's for you, boys," he beckoned the six Panhandle warriors, and they gathered about the messenger, who addressed them in Spanish.

"The Kid says to tell you this for him. When you come, come fighting. That is all."

He turned and left the room. The players picked up their cards.

"Your bet, Pat," Tom Emory said.

The others trooped back to the bar.

" 'Pears to me like it's about time you set up the drinks, Griselkowski," one remarked.

And if that greeting—the first to pass between their former friends and them since the day when they had waved their careless farewells in Tascosa—had set any of them to thinking, no one betrayed the fact.

Within the week another Mexican rode into Puerta de Luna and when he had whispered his tidings the sheriff bade them saddle up. That night they rode forty-two miles to Fort Sumner and reined up before daybreak in front of the little adobe building down by the river where old Beaver Smith had been selling groceries, whisky and cartridges since the beginning of the Lincoln County war.

"Fill 'em up, boys," the proprietor bade them when they had aroused him and come inside. "This is on me."

He blinked under the glare of the smoking kerosene lamp. Time and ill luck had done their share to sour him, and John Chisum's cowboys had sharpened his misanthropy one frolicsome evening when they branded him on the hip with one of their employer's irons.

"Just so's folks 'll know what side you're on," they told him.

All factions looked alike to him and none looked good; but it was his messenger who had ridden over to Puerta de Luna. He swore now when some one spoke the outlaw's name.

"The Kid," he growled, "has like to ruint me. Owes me a bill of forty dollars right now fer whisky and ca'tridges. An'

me, I dassent say a word fer fear he'll take a notion to drill me between the eyes."

He turned to Garret.

"They was here las' night; the hull bunch of 'em. Done shot me up."

He pointed to some riddled tinware hanging from the rafters.

"Cain't keep a pot nor skillet out in sight no more. Hit her up ag'in, boys. They're in the ol' hospital building right now. They allus go there to sleep it off when they get done down here."

The long adobe, which had been used as a hospital before the Civil War, lay near the former parade-ground a half a mile away; a typical old-time structure of the Mexican fashion, with the doors of all the rooms opening to the outside air. They found a faint light shining from one of the windows and stole up to it in silence. A tiny flame was glowing in the little fireplace; a man's form showed shrouded in blankets on the earthen floor.

"When I say the word," Pat Garret whispered, "make a rush inside. And when you're in, start shooting."

He was stepping toward the door when the silence was broken by a yell.

"Don't shoot!"

The sleeper had awakened and was standing before them with uplifted hands. It was the Government mail carrier on his way down the river from Las Vegas. The outlaws had ridden straight away after leaving Beaver Smith's place.

They made their camp at Pete Maxwell's house that day and put their horses in his stable. Pat Garret sent word round Fort Sumner that no one should depart from town under pain of death. Evening was coming down when a Mexican sought out the sheriff and begged permission to go to a near-by arroyo and hunt his cow. There was no milk in the house and they had a little baby; it was very sick. He got the favor and departed after calling upon his saints to bless the man who had bestowed it. Night fell. The posse ate their supper and fed their horses.

"Bowdre's woman lives in the end room of the hospital building," Garret told them. "They'll hit for that as soon as they come. We'll go there and wait for 'em."

They stole across the parade ground and took their quarters in the room where they had come so near to killing the mail carrier. Lon Chambers went on guard. Jim East rolled up in his blankets to get a bit of sleep before taking his turn at sentry. The others sat down to a poker game about a blanket spread on the earthen floor. For chips they used spare cartridges.

And the Mexican who had told of the sick baby rode on through the night up the Arroyo Tivan to the place which men called Stinking Springs. Here, near the gully's bank, stood one of those little stone houses which are still so common in the New Mexican hills. He whistled a signal from the bed of the gulch. Then he approached the door.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded from within.

He answered with his name and told the news of the posse. Billy the Kid turned to young Tom O'Phalliard.

"You've been wanting to ride in the lead, Tom. I'll let you this time. We'll go to Pete Maxwell's barn and steal their horses. Set 'em afoot; and then we can kill 'em off as we blame please."

IT WAS nearing eleven o'clock. The poker players sat about the blanket on the earthen floor. Their shadows crawled back and forth on the wall, taking queer shapes before the fire's flickerings. At times the flames died low in the grate; then they flared again and the little heaps of cartridges glinted; the faces stood forth bathed in yellow light.

Barney Mason's loose lips drooped and his eyes shifted as he dealt the cards. Bob Williams leaned forward frowning. The two had been losing for some time back. Pat Garret's long body towered between them; the lids curtained his eyes until only narrow hazel slits showed beneath them. Tom Emory faced him, head back, smiling as if he were never so sure of good luck as now. Jim East dozed in his blankets.

Swift footsteps sounded outside; the door was flung open. Lon Chambers stood on the threshold.

"They're coming," he said quietly.

The gamblers sprang to their feet and seized their Winchesters—all save Tom Emory. He lingered and Jim East looked over his shoulder on his way to the door to see what had detained him. Emory was bending over the blanket, dropping an ace into his hand; he caught the other's eyes on him and winked. A moment later the two of them were out in the yard.

The sky was overcast; the snow gave the only light there was; against it the dark forms of the posse showed as vague black blurs. Somewhere in the night the scuffle of hoofs sounded. The noise increased and abruptly six horsemen came into sight around the corner of the building.

"Hands up!" Garret shouted.

Several slender tongues of red licked the blackness; the dry rattle of the rifles echoed on the adobe walls. The shapes of the horsemen merged into a thick mass which disintegrated as suddenly as it had come into being. The outlaws had wheeled their ponies and were in full flight. Only the man in the lead remained. He was bearing straight down on the warriors of the Panhandle.

"Don't shoot! I'm dying!"

They recognized the voice, and Jim East sprang forward in time to catch Tom O'Phalliard as he fell from the saddle. The hoof-beats were growing fainter already.

"Done run away," Pat Garret said.

They carried Tom O'Phalliard into the room. The bullet had ranged through his body just above the heart, and a thin bright red stream was jetting from the wound when they laid him on Jim East's quilts.

The poker players resumed their seats. The cartridges rattled as they shoved their bets into the middle of the blanket. Tom O'Phalliard raised his voice.

"—— you, Pat Garret, I hope you burn in ——"

"Raise you ten," the sheriff addressed Tom Emory.

The other two players had dropped out.

"And ten," Emory answered.

Jim East brought a cup of water and the dying man drank noisily. His head sank back and his voice came in a strained monotone consigning the lank sheriff to hell's torments. Pat Garret laid down his hand and glanced at the cards which had beaten it. His eyes remained curtained, his face expressionless.

"That's no way for a man to talk when he's dying, Tom," he said over his shoulder.

The outlaw went on—and on. The curses grew fainter. At last they stopped.

"Well," Jim East said, "he died nice." It was a warrior's sincere tribute to one who had gone down fighting to the very end.

Toward morning snow began to fall and by dawn it had completely obliterated the trails. The sheriff shook his head.

"Got to hole up and wait," he said.

So after burying Tom O'Phalliard's body in the old military graveyard they slept the day through, taking turn about at guard. Late in the evening Bud Wilcox rode in from his ranch.

"They stopped at my house early this morning," he told Garret, "and made me cook 'em a hot supper. Then they went on to Stinking Springs. You'll find 'em in that little stone cabin by the bank of the Arroyo Tivan."

The night was bitter cold when they rode forth from Fort Sumner. A few miles out they found a dead horse by the roadside.

"Dave Rudabaugh's," the rancher said. "He done rode double with Wilson the rest of the way out."

They left him at the ranch and pressed on against a bitter wind until they were fifteen miles out from the old military post. Here Garret halted them in the bed of the arroyo. He picked Lee Hall, Tom Emory and Jim East.

"You fellows come with me," he bade them. "Rest of you stick here with your horses."

The four crept up the gully, silent as the Apaches who used to range those hills, until the rank odor of sulfur water reached their nostrils and they saw the little rock house outlined against the sky. Dawn was just beginning to show along the eastern horizon. They worked their way on their bellies up the bank until they lay just beneath its brink within ten yards of the building.

The place had no windows; the door was the only opening. They watched it while the cold crept in through their garments and bit them to the bone. The eastern sky turned a delicate pink. A man could see to line his rifle sights.

Three horses were standing near the threshold, hitched to the vega poles; now and again one stamped or blew loudly. Suddenly the ears of all three pricked forward, and a faint sound came from within the stone walls. The door opened slowly. A man emerged carrying a nose bag. It was Charley Bowdre.

The dark sallow face was turned toward the hiding posse and from where he lay Jim East looked straight into the black eyes which he had seen alight with mirth many times in those noisy evenings two years ago at Tascosa.

"Hands up!" Pat Garret was calling.

Bowdre's right arm was dropping toward his revolver holster as the sheriff and Lee Hall fired.

"Got him," the former said quietly. "Save your ca'tridges, boys."

Bowdre staggered back a pace; the door flew open; he fell within and the four men under the bank heard Billy the Kid's boyish voice:

"Charley, they've got you. Get out and see if you can't get one of them before you die."

And Charley Bowdre came reeling back across the threshold.

The door slammed behind him. He walked straight toward the bank, swaying from side to side. The men who were lying there watched him across their rifle sights and saw his feet dragging, his fingers fumbling aimlessly at the big revolver butt. His face was gray and little beads of sweat showed on his forehead. Then his knees sagged under him and he pitched forward upon his face beside Lee Hall.

"Dead," Hall whispered.

Pat Garret's level voice brought them back to the day's work.

"Boys. We got to shoot those picket ropes in two."

The Winchesters spoke slowly and the horses snorted in terror. When two had galloped away, freed by well-aimed bullets, the sheriff shot the other down before the doorway.

"Got the entrance blocked now. The Kid's keeping his racing mare inside. He can't make a wolf dash for it this time."

He nodded to Lee Hall—

"Go and get the rest of the boys."

When the others had come and they had surrounded the little building he raised his voice.

"You fellows may's well surrender now. We've got you."

Billy the Kid called out profane defiance, and then there was silence. It lasted through the day, with but one interruption. Toward the middle of the afternoon a subdued thumping sound came from the rear of the house. Jim East and Lee Hall crept to that side and waited until a movement in the rock wall told them where the outlaws were trying to pick a loophole. They lined their sights on the spot and fired. The hammering stopped.

Dusk was settling down when one of the posse caught sight of a flutter of white above the roof tree. The beleaguered ones had tied a handkerchief to a pole and raised it through the fireplace chimney. Pat Garret crept up the brink of the bank beside Charley Bowdre's frozen body.

"All right," he called. "When you come out, come with your hands up, all of you."

"Give us your word to take us safe to Santa Fé," a voice demanded.

The promise was given. The door was opened and Billy the Kid stepped forth upon the threshold.

Barney Mason's rifle flew to his shoulder. A year ago he had been one of the young outlaw's band.

"Kill him like a wolf," he shouted.

Jim East covered the traitor with his Winchester from one side and Lee Hall's weapon menaced him from the other.

"You drop that gun," East bade him, "or we'll fill your hide full of holes."

And then the outlaws came on with upraised arms.

The next day, in Beaver Smith's store, captors and prisoners lined up before the little bar. Billy the Kid smiled boyishly at Jim East and pointed to his confiscated Winchester carbine which had been stacked with the rest of the captured weapons over in a corner of the room.

"That's yours," he said, "for a keepsake."

But Beaver Smith's lamentations filled the place.

"You owing me a fo'ty-dollar bill fer ca'tridges and whisky," he cried bitterly, "and on your way to get hung. That there's no way to treat a man!"

"Oh, ——," the outlaw growled. "Leave him have the gun, Jim. We'll swop hats, anyhow, to remember each other by."

THEY talked as in the old days during the long ride to Puerta de Luna and again Jim East felt the spell of that boyish affability which had lain upon him at Tascosa. Billy the Kid had never been more captivating than he was now, when every mile was bringing him nearer to Santa Fé, with the gallows looming at the journey's end. His smile had never been so ingenuous. Garret himself relaxed and more than once broke his habit of taciturnity. Traveling by open wagon in the Winter is bad enough at any time; the wind was in their faces during these two days, and the New Mexican weather was at its worst; yet they arrived at the little

village in high spirits—for who could sulk among the captors when the doomed youth was taking it so well?

Puerta de Luna boasted a single eating-place. Across the street stood an unoccupied adobe building with one long room. The prisoners were shackled two-together; Billy the Kid and Dave Rudabaugh; Wilson and Pickett; and while the other members of the posse went to get a bite to eat, Jim East was left in the adobe to guard the outlaws. The door was locked upon them from the outside.

The four in chains sat before the fireplace and the cowboy perched himself upon a little woodpile, with the room's length between them. His forty-five was in his holster, his Winchester in his hand. Thus they took their positions when the bolt rasped home. The footfalls of the departing posse grew fainter outside; silence came. The minutes began to drag.

The group before the fire were jesting in undertones; now and again the leader's boyish tenor rose above the other voices; occasionally one of them threw back his head and laughed. Jim East remained silent on the wood-pile and kept his eyes upon them; there was something about this situation, with the locked door and the wooden-shuttered windows, which he did not like.

Time crawled. Billy the Kid looked over his shoulder and flashed a smile at the solitary guard.

"Getting hungry, ol'-timer?" he called. "Well so am I."

Dave Rudabaugh turned his head and his yellow teeth showed beneath his walrus mustache.

"I could eat a raw hoss," he asserted with an oath. And then they went on talking with their two companions.

"Oh, Jim!" It was the Kid again. He rose as he spoke and perforce of those shackles Dave Rudabaugh rose with him. "Give me the makings, will you? I want to smoke."

"An' he ain't got nothin' only a habit," Dave Rudabaugh laughed loudly at his own time-worn joke. Jim East fumbled in his pockets for the Bull Durham and brown papers and the pair took a step toward him.

"All right, boys," he told them, "I'll throw 'em to you."

He was having some trouble finding the tobacco among a litter of cartridges and odds and ends. He glanced up and saw that they had come half-way across the room.

"You just wait there," he said.

They laughed and came on. He raised his rifle.

"Stay right where you are!"

Billy the Kid cursed him after the manner of the cowboy who wants to show his affection.

"Shoot us! What's the matter with you? An old friend like you be!"

His smile had never been quite so engaging as it was now. And the two of them took another step. The rifle was at Jim East's shoulder. Dave Rudabaugh swore jovially. They had come within ten feet of the woodpile.

There was no mirth in the oath which Jim East flung back at them.

"And I'm going to kill you the next step," he ended.

His eyes had narrowed, seeking the sights. The pair halted and gazed at him in hurt wonder. He kept his cheek to the rifle stock until they had turned away, and then he tossed the tobacco after them.

"If that's the way you feel about it," Billy the Kid grinned shamelessly as he picked up the sack, "I dunno's I want a smoke."

He tossed it back.

"Come on, Dave."

They rejoined their two companions at the fire.

The nearest railway station was Las Vegas, whither the journey was made through a blinding blizzard. The men reached the little town half frozen, all but starved. Of the original posse Garret had retained Jim East and Tom Emory to help him guard the prisoners, whom they locked up that night in the little adobe jail.

"If we can get 'em away on tomorrow's train for Santa Fé," Pat Garret said, "we're as good as through with the job."

There was excellent reason for that "if." Dave Rudabaugh had slain Juan Lopez, the jailer a year before in liberating a companion, and his victim had been a popular man in the community. That night none of them slept, but save for a few prowling Mexicans, whom they drove off without trouble, no man interrupted their hours on guard. Daylight came; morning wore on to noon; they took the outlaws to the railway station in east Las Vegas and placed them aboard the train when it pulled in.

Then suddenly, the drowsing town woke up. A murmur down the street; it swelled to a bass uproar, and a mob of more than

fifty men swept around the corner of the little station on the run.

As the mob came within sight of the train the deep-toned uproar increased in volume to a mighty shout, then died at once to silence. Every man was armed, and it needed only a glance to tell that they were of the breed who knew how to use their weapons.

Pat Garret turned to the two cowboys.

"Throw those windows open and cover 'em," he said quietly, and, raising his voice to carry the length of the car, "You passengers get out!"

He thrust his rifle barrel through the nearest pane. One could hear the jingle of the glass in the stillness.

"You boys," he addressed the prisoners without looking around, "drop on the floor."

He spoke more loudly to his companions, so that all the mob might hear.

"See that baggage truck. First man passes it, kill him."

There followed a few seconds during which the crowd on the platform hung back, irresolute. Jim East was looking across the sights of his Winchester, drawing a fine bead on the forehead of a blacksmith who stood in the mob's forefront wearing his leathern apron, with a double-barreled shotgun in his two hands. A noise up forward by the engine made him shift his eyes, and he spoke quietly to the sheriff—

"Two of 'em have got the engineer out of the cab."

And as he made the announcement a man tapped Garret on the shoulder from behind.

"My name's Morely," he said. "I'm a United States postal inspector; used to be an engineer. I'll sneak up on the other side from the station and make the cab, if you say so."

"Go ahead," Pat Garret bade him.

"Say," Tom Emory demanded from his window, "who's these two ol'-timers behind you, Pat?"

In the stress of that afternoon's events they never did get the names of the grizzled pair, nor any trace of their identities beyond the fact that they were Montana miners down here on a prospecting expedition. They had, they said, paid their fare to Santa Fé, and they did not propose to walk. Also they were very blithe to fight, if the occasion gave them opportunity.

"Take a window, each of you," the sheriff bade them.

The mob had been stirring for some moments now. A voice arose in its rear.

"Come on, boys. Hang them!"

Jim East again regarded the big blacksmith across the rifle sights. The crowd began to surge forward. The smith was within two paces of the baggage truck when a shout from the end of the depot building brought them to a halt.

"That would be George Poindexter and his bunch," Pat Garret said to East.

The night before, Poindexter had come to them and told them of lynching threats. In case of trouble he had promised to be on hand; and now he stood, with Jim MacIntyre, George Close and three others, covering the mob with rifles from behind.

The roar of the locomotive's exhaust reached the ears of the men in the windows and they could hear the shriek of spinning drive wheels. The mob let out a mighty yell and swept forward, but, before a shot was fired, the train started off with a terrific jerk.

"He's made it," Tom Emory shouted.

"Got her lined out on the trail," Jim East called back. The station platform was away behind them. They slammed down the windows and the prisoners arose to settle in their seats for the ride to Santa Fé.

THE young grass was sprouting in the hills when Jim East rejoined the wagon crew at San Ilario the next Spring. When he had listened to the story of Charley Siringo's part in the discovery of the stolen beef—a tale which will be told elsewhere in its time—he answered the questions of his fellow warriors. They had heard the details of the fighting and the capture but there was lacking one thing which they wished to know.

"Five hundred dollars in gold," he told them, "and the governor gave it to us when we turned the prisoners over at Santa Fé. What did we do? Why, fiddled and danced and ate for a whole week. Then I went down to the sand-hill country scouting with a lieutenant against the Mescallero Apaches."

The flames glowed red by the wagon. The men rolled up in their blankets under the great yellow stars. It had been a large Winter and, if any one cared to take thought, its events had brought much food for reflection. Such things mark the turning points in men's lives. Before they went to sleep Jim East spoke to Tom Emory—

"I wonder," said he, "if they have got a real saloon in Tascosa yet."

SANDY RUE

by Henry Herbert Knibbs

A GRAY horse in the moonlight, a shadow on the wall;
Like laughter of a soul bewitched, a far coyote's call——
Three horsemen drew beside the gate that took the doorway light,
And one called out for Sandy Rue to ride with them the night.

"'Tis long we had a word of you and far we made the ride.
We waited by The Burning Hill and by the river side;
Nor once have you come back to curse the places where we died."

Another spake, as Sandy Rue put hand upon the gray,
And, fumbling, gave the horse the bit, nor had a word to say;
"And so you saddled in the night and rode to shoot me down;
'Tis long since men have seen your face in old Sonora town."

"'Tis long we had a word of you; Chiquita's mouth is cold;
Forgotten is the song she sang, the secret that she told;
Yet you remember, Sandy Rue, the sin you did for gold."

Another voice—and Sandy Rue had leather through the ring;
He drew the cincha, made the tie and gave the rein a fling;
His boot was to the stirrup, then: "Your hands have kept the knack,
As when we crossed the San Gorgone—and only one came back.

"'Tis far from here to San Gorgone, the where you let me lie,
Beside the empty water-hole, beneath a burning sky,
Your sin the promise that you gave—and left me there to die."

Then spake the first, as Sandy Rue with swift and cunning hand,
Drew gun and fired at viewless things from out the desert land,
While spent, the shots were lost in space that whistled to their flight:
"Put by the gun and mount your horse; you ride with us the night!"

The cabin window-panes were red with dawn across the hill,
And Sandy's cat lay curled against the sunlit window-sill,
But Sandy's soul had gone to join the ghosts he could not kill.

Beyond his aged and wasted hand lay Sandy's empty gun,
And so a rancher found him, stark, beneath the desert sun,
Yet never mark of harm nor hate, nor track of those who ride,
For trackless are the fantom trails that cross the Great Divide.

So Evil turned upon itself and slew the thing it made,
And simple praise was on the stone where Sandy Rue was laid;
And kindly hearts with desert flowers his lonely grave arrayed.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS is a question for the scientists among us. What race of little men made those tunnels that are too small for ordinary humans to use?

Washington, D. C.

For several years I have been a silent member of "Camp-Fire," and I can not think of a better way to settle a very interesting question in my mind than to submit it to the combined experience of Camp-Fire's cooperators and readers.

Fifteen years ago, while traveling in Sumatra, I stopped at the Gold Mine "Redjang Lebong," and was shown there several tunnels, dug through the richest part of the veins, evidently made by some former inhabitants of the island; these tunnels are so narrow that even the smallest cooly (imported Malays) can not enter them any distance, therefore the length of these tunnels was at that time unknown. I did not hear of any other indication of Sumatra ever having been inhabited by dwarfs. Is it possible that the dwarfs of the Filipinos in former times occupied the entire Indian Archipelago and that they were civilized enough to know how to extract gold from the rocks?—J. A. DE L.

A WORD from Lieutenant Thomson Burtis concerning his story in this issue:

Godman Field, Camp Knox, Stithton, Kentucky.

The genesis of the story is a natural one. Flying pay was taken away as stated in the story, and many of the enlisted men were New York bums who resented it greatly. Three of them were taken back to New York from Langley under the care of policemen to answer charges of murder and larceny. It was a scummy gang, in which *Severa* would have been by no means conspicuous.

His scheme to get revenge is a good one. What happened to him will seem more thrilling to outsiders than to those in the Air Service who know how easy it would be to bomb a Martin in the air from a scout. A Martin was found gasless, practically, before one of the bombing trips.

Regarding the propeller incident, there are still about six men a year, experienced mechanics, who forget the propeller and walk into it when it is running. Sergeant Millspaugh's position was a perfectly natural one.—BURTIS.

"UNCLE FRANK" HUSTON asks me to tell Camp-Fire that his address is now 528 14th Street, San Diego, California, and that he'll be glad to see any of you any time he's at home.

THE FOLLOWING is a translation of a letter written in French from a comrade in Lima, Peru, to Thomas Samson Miller on the derivation of the word "gringo," generally supposed to have originated from Americans singing "*Green grow* the rushes, O!" in Latin American countries:

I desire to obtain through your mediation the address of some person familiar with African tongues in the countries which furnished slaves to the American colonies, to consult with him on the subject of the word "gringo," which I consider of African origin.

We say "gringo" for the most part in the American republics, but in Colombia and Venezuela one says "Guango." I know that in the south of Africa one says "um-l-ungo," the white man; ungo being man. If it follows that gur (or ar) signifies red, flushed, rosy complexion, as I expect, we have the explanation of the term "gringo" so much sought after, which means precisely—rubicund man.

The word gringo invented by the peons does not belong at all to languages hereabouts. It belongs to a dialect spoken by the African slaves, introduced into our countries in former times.

Thanking you for your kindness in advance and with my most cordial greeting— ——.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Alan B. LeMay follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself. There are other yarns of his to come.

Aurora, Illinois.

Most of my interesting experiences have happened to my friends. This is my fault, I know, but give me time. Just now I am trying to get myself graduated from the University of Chicago. They seem to be fond of me there—hate to give me my diploma, for fear I'll leave, you know.

IN THE past few years, when not in school, I've tried a number of things. If I wanted to make a good yarn out of this, I'd remark that at the age of twenty-two I've been a sailor, lumberjack, cowpuncher in Florida, deep sea fisherman, exploring geologist, advertising man, army officer, and news reporter. But that would be an exaggeration.

If I gave you a line like that, a lumberjack named Dugan (he reads *Adventure*) would probably write in from Minnesota and say: "I know this guy—he's a fake. He swings a ax like I chew tobacco." And some one else would sound off: "As a geologist Al LeMay is the cuckoo that took a hunk of resin for blackjack, and bet his boots on it!" And so forth, as they say when they run out of ideas.

THE facts of the case are that I've tried a turn or two at all those things, mainly to see what they were like. My chief interest is in men. All kinds of men, men doing different sorts of things outdoors. Every so often I have to strike out and find some new outfit that is doing something outdoors that I have never tried. So, maybe I can't stay on a cayuse after the first jump, or shoot a dime out of the air, or pile on sail when every one else is under match-sticks; but I bet, by gosh, that I know the men that can!

Speaking of these sea yarns of mine—I got the ideas while sailing on a 35-ton sloop in the Caribbean last Spring. I liked the little ship, and favored sailing her around the world; but the captain, weeping bitterly, told me in deep blue Spanish that she sailed like a city block and made him want to get out and push.

I hope you like the yarns. If you get half the kick out of reading them that I get out of telling them, why, I guess they'll get by all right.—ALAN B. LEMAY.

HE HAS it all right. Only just starting, but the itching foot will carry him far, this comrade:

United States Naval Station,
Olongapo, Philippine Islands.

Dear Ole Camp-Fire:—That's a good thing to do, that leaving a good magazine where some stranded brother can find it. I have one here now which has two names on it and will soon have another one on it as soon as I finish reading it.

I guess I had better tell you what I am so you will know what kind of a tramp I am. I am a sailor in the good old U. S. Navy and stationed at the above address.

I haven't had many adventures as yet, the fact is I haven't had time to have many. I am twenty, and came from the little ole State of Iowa.

I have hiked out through the mountains around here a little but haven't seen anything of much interest. I saw one big snake about eighteen or twenty feet long, but not having anything to try and kill him with, I pulled my freight and left him by his own sweet lonesome.

I made a couple of liberties at Hawaii and Gaum on my way out here and have been through a few States back in U. S.

Was in Japan and will be in China or up the river some place in the near future, and I hope I get to go back home through the Panama Canal.

I guess the closest I ever came to getting drowned or to death was coming back from Subic on last Fourth of July. My partner and myself were the only white people on the bay and we had some time getting back. We were all sea-sick and a couple of squaws in the banco were praying. We broke an outrigger off before we got a good start and were washed up on the beach. We got it fixed good

enough to start out again and were going along fine when a line broke and our sail swung loose and very near swamped us.

When we did get in I will tell the world that I felt like a piece of lucky driftwood that got thrown up on the beach to dry out.

Well, I guess this won't interest any one very much so I might as well close.

Wishing you the best of luck to all of the camp-fire.—G. E. SMITH.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Mary Gaunt introduces herself on the occasion of her first story in our magazine:

I was one of a family of five boys and two girls and my earliest recollection is of a strong determination on the part of the Gaunt family to wander. Perhaps it was that we were Australians and an Australian thinks less of setting out to go round the world than the ordinary English citizen does of a jaunt of five and twenty miles to London. We always regarded money as a means to wander.

"I shall see England—and Europe—and Asia—and America—when I have the money."

MORE or less in the course of the years we did find the money. I myself, though handicapped by being a girl in the days when girls were not allowed so much individuality as they are in this golden Twentieth Century, have seen some of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and a little tiny bit of America. I came to London, a widow, twenty years ago to make my way in the literary world with exactly ten shillings a week between me and starvation—well, hardly starvation. I suppose my people would have backed me if I had asked, which I didn't—and I have succeeded in a measure in accomplishing some of my childish desires.

I have wandered down the Murray in my native land; I have seen the sealing ships setting out for Kamchatka in the mouth of the Amur River; I have landed in little known Saghalien; I have suffered the blazing heat of the Congo, and watched in the Bight of Benin the shipping of slaves—apprentices they called them—to the cocoa plantations in Portuguese West Africa; I have landed at the end of the navigable waters of the Gambia; I have slept in the old world forts along the Guinea Coast; I have canoed up the lovely Volta; I have remembered Mark Twain on the muddy waters of the Mississippi and been turned back from the yellow waters of the Hoangho because robber bands were desolating Shensi in far away inland China.

I HAVE gathered flowers on the great green plains of Siberia and looked through the windows of the Wall of China at the Mongolian hills beyond. I have watched the Chinese gentlemen with hooded hawk on wrist in the valleys of temples that lie far beyond that wall. I have walked in the Forbidden City in Peking. I have stood beneath the palms in the scented cinnamon gardens of Ceylon. I have seen the almond trees coming into blossom on the rugged slopes of Etna and gathered daffodils in Corsica. I have seen the last year's snow lying in the ravines of the Dovrefield in Norway and looked at the Tzar's palace in Petrograd. I have seen prisoners of the great war at the railway stations in the Ural Mountains and I have stood on the deck of a Swedish ship raided by the Germans and watched the sailor men of English ships haled to a German prison. The sun went down behind the German torpedo-boat and the men and boat and guns stood out a sharp silhouette against the gold. I have watched the gold and red of the sunrise through the great trunks of the gums in my native land and I have seen him set gorgeous in gold and purple and tenderest green across the blue waters of the opalescent sea that lies round northern Jamaica.

Truly I have found this world of ours a place of fascination, and if I may succeed in writing for *Adventure* some of the stories I have seen or imagined in the settings that I have seen I shall be delighted. I thank you for your very kindly welcome and hope I shall succeed in pleasing you.—MARY GAUNT.

EASTERN readers please note, especially New Yorkers. I've been asked myself, by a well-educated Brooklynite, about buffalo hunting in Ohio where I came from. Quite a number of years ago, but not enough years to get buffalo into Ohio. My mother saw them in the wild state, but she traveled some thousands of miles by railroad and wagon train—Colorado—to do it.

Dallas, Texas.

It seems that nearly every man now living north of the Mason-Dixon Line has the firm opinion that Texans were and still are a bunch of gun-totin', bronc-ridin', big-hatted bad-men, and that it is an every-day occurrence for a bunch of cowboys to ride into Dallas or San Antonio or Austin and shoot up the town. Far be it from me to put the dime-novel writers out of a means of daily bread, but there are a bunch of such-like impressions running around loose that should be herded together and given a coat of fresh paint—they show signs of hard wear.

DALLAS cowboys are, as a rule, perfectly polite and genteel; in fact we locally refer to 'em as "Jelly-Beans"—if you get the idea. No man is allowed to carry more than two six-shooters and a knife in view, and all saloons, dance-halls and palaces of chance must close from eleven to twelve on Sunday, so that the employees can attend church. It is still permissible, of course, for a native to shoot the bootheels off any city dude who happens to drop in from the East, but it's agin th' law to shoot out the lights on Main, Elm or Commerce Streets, unless you've just been married or somethin'.

FOR fear that satire'll only add fuel to the flames, I'll put it differently. There're more than a hundred and fifty thousand people in Dallas, and a guy in cowboy rig attracts more attention on our streets than would be shown in New York City. The only thing that'll scare a horse here is to see another horse, and if you're caught with a pistol it's a hundred dollars or twice that many days on our nice little City Farm. Shootings occur with less frequency, in proportion to our population, than in most of the big towns of the North and East,

but we rank pretty high in the list of automobile homicides.

We've got traffic cops an' skyscrapers an' most everything they brag about in New York; there's scarcely a man living in any one of our twenty larger cities who could not step on to Broadway and make you think that was his happy home.

NOW, there still are places in our vast and rather unsettled sections to the south, west and in the Mexico border country, where, for good and sufficient reasons, this gun-totin' law is considered suspended. Conditions there are such that a man would be a fool to recognize a law that prohibited his own protection, so the officials down there just have a case of bad memory and forget that Old Man Sullivan ever attended Congress. But when you leave that country it's different.

Texas was once a Wild-West State, but the old times are gone. There are men living here in Dallas today who can tell about chasing steers over trails in the brush and through the Trinity River bottoms into what are now the business streets of the city, but—it ain't done any more! True, there are still some big ranches in the State; the King holdings in southern Texas being particularly noted, but when you read that blood-and-thunder stuff or see it on the screen next time, remember—"it couldn't happen in real life!"

A WESTERN film was shown on one of our screens some time ago, and one heading called the attention of the audience to the coming events of a "quiet" evening in Mesquite, Tex. Those events were anything but orderly but the joke is that we really have a Mesquite, Texas, and it's only a very few miles from Dallas. At each successive showing of that caption and the happenings it preceded the house was convulsed at the thought of any such pep being shown by the placid natives of the real Mesquite.

About two years ago a kid about fifteen years old was discovered alighting from the rods of a freight in a local yard. He wore a gun-belt full of shells, two Colts and a long frog-sticker, and was rigged out in the most approved movie style for cowboys. When taken to the Police Station he told 'em that he was quite disappointed and that Dallas was very unkind to a prospective Indian-killer and all-'round dead-shot. It developed that he was the son of a wealthy manufacturer in New York and that he had imbibed the idea of coming to Texas from lurid Wild West Weekly stories. Dad sent the necessary wherewithal and the kid was sent home to think over the fact you can't always sometimes tell.—V. S. BOWDEN.

SOMETIMES in your letters I find a note of doubt as to the genuineness of Santie Sabalala, author of our articles on African life. You can be assured. In the beginning we investigated his references, one of whom happened to be known personally to us. Later he came to New York himself and has been in the office many times. Two of the staff, William Ashley Anderson and L. Patrick Greene, have spent a number of years in Africa and know the natives well enough to be pretty sound judges of authenticity. In addition, others who have had African experience, like Talbot Mundy, read the articles, and no one of you has raised a single concrete point on which Mr. Sabalala seemed to deviate from fact.

A Cleveland man brought him and other native boys to this country to be educated. While still a boy he returned to his native country, spent a year and a half there and came back to the United States.

His articles not only make good reading but are an extremely valuable contribution to the world's knowledge.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom Frank C. Robertson rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. A man who faces hard luck in the spirit he shows—well, I'll bet that at the end of his letter he finds himself with a lot of friends among us.

Hatch, Idaho.

To Camp-Fire: I am glad to step out of the shadows where I have long been a silent listener, and make my bow to Camp-Fire. Of myself there is little of interest to relate. I was born about thirty-two years ago in the "panhandle" of Idaho, and all my life has been spent in the West.

I BANGED shut the door of a little country schoolhouse when I was thirteen, and promptly proceeded to forget what I had learned up to that time; nor have I ever attended a school of any kind since except *via* correspondence. I have spent the intervening years at ranch work, with cattle, sheep, skinning a four-horse team, wielding various sticks of ignorance on a number of Uncle Sam's reclamation projects, and between jobs hoboing it, riding side-door Pullmans, hitting up back doors and the rest of it.

This writing bug first bit me about ten years ago, and never did it have leaner prospects of getting a full meal. I began sending in a few little articles to a small socialist paper of a local circulation. The editors were kindly men, and they labored valiantly to effect some sort of order out of my weird spelling, grammar and punctuation. I had just one thing to put into those articles that was of any value—unbounded enthusiasm and sincerity. After a year or so the little paper went the way of all the earth and I found no more victims.

MEANTIME I had folks who were depending upon me for money, so I had to get a steady job. Therefore I began to herd sheep, which is extremely steady—twenty-four hours a day. This lasted two years, and my writing ambition was gradually allowed to fade. Let me say here that herding sheep is far from being the monotonous life it is usually portrayed to be. Some day I hope to prove this. My own experience was varied by feeding on a ranch in the Winter, and shipping pure-bred sheep all over the West in the Fall. I

had now graduated from side-door Pullmans to cabooses.

A wave of homesteading had set in that was driving the cattle and sheep from the range, and I, too, lost my head and filed on a "dry farm"—accent on the dry—which I worked with one of my brothers. Since then I have had no adventures. My time has all been occupied by such prosaic things as getting married, fighting drouth, frost, waves of rabbits, squirrels, grasshoppers, red mites, collectors, and other insects. It has been quite a game, this raising wheat and selling it for from fifty cents to a dollar below the cost of production; but I have played it till the timekeeper has blown his whistle. Only last week I received a letter from the gentlemen who hold the mortgage on our farm saying: "Unless you pay the interest in the next ten days we must foreclose." That means that once again I shall be foot-loose, and I am glad. I have not the least bit of bitterness at the result.

TWO years ago the writing bug returned to the attack, and a little over a year and a half ago I received money from an editor. Oh, unbelievable happening! I have had a few small successes since, mixed in with a great many more rejections. It has not been easy—this writing. Getting up at five o'clock to milk the cows and tend to a six-horse team, working nine or ten hours in the field, doing chores again until seven or eight, and then giving up most of the available amusements to wrastle with the typewriter. But, boys, it has been good for me, and a lot of fun. Nothing truer was ever said than that "sweet are the uses of adversity."

At that I'm afraid I wouldn't have had the nerve to keep trying had I not had a brother who was always ready to step in and take the dirty jobs to give me time to write and study, and who, in the face of a cloud of rejection slips always said, "Bore in, you're sure to win out." I've only got one foot on the ladder, but I'm going to do my durndest to keep on climbing.

AS TO the origin of the story "The Hole in the Rock," my oldest brother was for many years a cowboy and, though he had lost one leg below the knee, was known throughout several large counties as a skilful, dare-devil rider. My other brother and I were wondering one day how he would have acted had he been placed in an earlier environment when gun-toting was in vogue. The story was the outcome. The incident of the cattle being counted twice was based upon an actual happening years ago in my own neighborhood. Only, then the cattle were counted around a hill, and the whole bunch were counted twice—and paid for.

I shall now try to get back to my place as gracefully as I can, and let some better man speak.—FRANK C. ROBERTSON.

MARCH 30th I received the following letter, dated February 10, from Gordon MacCreagh, of "A. A." and our writers' brigade, our first word from him since he lost sight of West Coast civilization and dived into the Amazon jungle to emerge at Manaos. As you will see, his letter is very largely to his Camp-Fire comrades in general:

Manaos, Brazil.

Emerged, as you see, after a year in the jungles. A rather meanish sort of year with some hard travel and a damnable amount of rain and stinking, oozy humidity, but unpleasant chiefly on account of the eight million distinct species of bugs that infest the landscape all the way from the foot-hills of Bolivia down to the Amazon—and God knows how much farther.

ORDINARY stinging things like hornets and saw flies and spiders don't matter a whole lot; one gets to accept them more or less philosophically and to draw a compensating joy out of seeing the other fellow jump when he gets his. But what got our goats and drove us to frantic profanity were bees and borers of various sorts.

Little stingless hard-shell bees which would hover all day an inch from one's eye, and if one kept one eye open for some such foolish purpose as to see where one was going the brute thing would fly right into it. Tiny little devils they were with a damnable vitality. Every now and then with almost superhuman patience and skill one might catch one and, having squashed it, might hurl it to the ground with a curse—whereupon the thing would shake itself, walk around a bit, and come right back. ——, how they annoyed us! If one kept ones eyes shut and just fell over the lianas and things they weren't so awfully particular; they would just as soon penetrate to one's lung through the nasal passages. I still swear when I think of them.

THE borer things were not so exasperating but much worse for the health. While the bee brutes destroyed our souls the borers attended to our bodies. Generally speaking their habits are just the same as wood borers, only they prefer to work in live flesh.

The commonest is called by the Indians a screw worm. It is the larva of one of the fat yellow flies. It seems that mamma fly sneaks in and lays an egg in one's clothes when they are hanging out to dry. Then the heat of one's body conveniently incubates the egg—truly God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform—and the grub immediately digs in under the skin, where he waxes strong and fat and reminds one of his presence every now and then by drilling to enlarge his lodging. The feeling is just like being drilled into by an auger, hence the name. Since the things grow to one inch in length, you can imagine how urgent they can feel when they are at work.

BUT those are just common things. Anybody can have them—and everybody does. But me, I am the discoverer and breeder of a hitherto unknown species. Dermatobium MacCreaghei. This beggar set up housekeeping in my leg; and it was by the greatest luck that I found here in Manaos a young doctor—a white man—who had come out especially to study the bugs of Brazil. My bug had a tunnel four inches long with a breathing hole and a trap door to it. The doctor man sat over the hole in the greatest excitement, exactly like an Eskimo waiting over a seal's blow-hole in the ice. For three days he fished—for the sake of science; he wanted to catch the thing alive and breed it out to see just what sort of a hornet might develop. But it was too slick for him. Finally he had to give up with regret and carve for the beggar. And at that he

couldn't get it the first day, because the tunnel ran around under the shin bone and Mr. Dermatobium retreated to the far end and barked at him. So the wily doctor man stuffed some nasty tasting dope into the hole, and the next day Dermatobium was up near the surface and was grabbed with a pair of forceps; and even then it had to be injected with chloroform before it could be got out. One and three-quarter inches long was the beast, shaped like a pollywog with six rows of spines round the fattest part which could be protruded so as to hang on right where the beast wanted to stay.

Phooie! And then it turned out that the cunning beast had made a lining to his burrow of some highly poisonous stuff which didn't matter until some foolish doctor person gashed it up and mixed things a bit in one's system. So my leg "swole" all up and the fever joyfully seized upon the opportunity to take a riotous spell and my hæmoglobin test showed sixty-five when it ought to have registered one hundred. So of course my earnest advice to enthusiastic adventurers who yearn for Brazilian jungles is the same as I would give to any man and brother about marriage.

Though I collected all these bugs in Bolivia anyhow. But, as the doctor man said, What matter? It was really an entirely new species.

I'M FORGETTING one of the main reasons for writing. I would like, through the columns of Camp-Fire, to thank all the comrades who so promptly answered my appeal for information when I was starting out on this trip. Some couple of dozen letters came through to me in La Paz from men who had been in various parts of South America. None of them happened to know this Bolivian Yungas and the Amazonas districts, but I very much appreciated their wishes for luck and godspeed. I wrote to such of them as gave any address; but most of them seemed to be such confirmed wanderers that they never thought of such a thing as a permanent address. Do you find that sort of thing too in the sundry acres of correspondence you receive?

Camp-Fire. What can I talk about to the friends of Camp-Fire? Not a —— thing. Nothing exciting has happened. Nobody has ducked his head just in time to hear the whiz and see the quivering shaft sticking in a tree. No enormous snake has hypnotized anybody into walking down its throat. Nobody has been picked up stifled by the sickly-sweet scent of the flaming orchid.

THOUGH we've come through country where the Indians killed a priest a couple of years ago; which same Indians were very nice to us. Though we've been through the slimiest, sweatiest snake country. In which connection I've carefully measured every skin I've seen, the largest of which measured a paltry twenty-four feet, and the largest I've seen alive myself was eighteen and a bit. But I've heard the invariable tale about the monster of eighteen meters which ate up the head man's cow last month; and an Indian showed me a track through a swamp a good three feet across which he stoutly maintained was that of a vast serpent; but me, I think it was where another Indian had forced a dugout canoe.

And as for orchids. I've personally collected about every orchid in the Amazon basin. I've found orchids that smelt like roses and others that smelt like bananas and yet others that stank like dead things; and the orchid expert of the expedish has bet me everything on earth against one that would even give a catch to the breath—though there was one that was just like absinthe.

NO, SIR, nary an adventure during one whole year in that fearsomely advertised region, the Amazon jungle.

But no, I must modify that. Some of us *have* had adventures; thrilling happenings that they will remember to the end of their lives. And in this connection I'm going to start an argument.

You remember, of course, the Camp-Fire letters about the Spirit of Adventure. Well, I want to put the question, "What is Adventure?" I've been thinking about this thing a heap as we've rambled along and I've had the opportunity to observe the rest of the crowd. Hitherto when I've been out anywhere I've been alone and I haven't ever spent a thought on thrills; but this time I've been in a position to observe the reactions of various happenings upon people of varying temperaments.

I raise the point, then: Isn't Adventure all a matter of temperament?

I'll give you reasons and instances.

TO BEGIN with, there was a certain elderly scientist with the expedish, a man who had never been anywhere wild before, who had traveled in Pullman cars and ocean liners. He came out primed with the idea that this was going to be the most thrilling event of his life. The very second day out on the trail, crossing one of the passes of the Andes, we had a rainy, slimy day with some quite bad trail skirting the mountain scarps, slippery, clayey stuff. I went ahead with two others of the party and after a long stiff day's trek arrived at the mountain village which had been agreed upon as the night's camp. As usual, of course, we had been misinformed about the distance, and the village was a —— sight farther than we had expected; but the mean part of it was that the baggage didn't arrive; no blankets, and thirteen thousand feet up—I had to sleep with a Syrian pedler that night; it's amazing how they crawl into the outermost parts of God's earth.

But that's not the point. The next afternoon the rest of the caravan arrived, nothing untoward having happened, except that only one mule out of over fifty had gone over the side. But the scientifico who was expecting thrills—goshamighty, he arrived all done up, pale and sweating. He cussed me, as being in charge of travel and camps, for having chosen this trail when I might have taken another longer one—which might or might not have been safer—he cussed the leader of the expedish for having decided to travel at all on that day, maintaining that he ought to have stayed in camp till the rain stopped and the trail dried up; and he made the deliberate charge that the leader was a potential murderer for having so decided against his advice. On the trail itself he had been scared to walk across the bad places because, he said, he would have had to keep his eyes open to see where he was going and the precipices then would have made him dizzy. So he rode his mule with his eyes tightly shut and had it led by hand with a rope tied round his own waist and held by another man behind.

NOW that is an extreme case, of course; but that man had the most thrilling adventure of his life. He felt it so keenly that he wrote home about

it, wrote to his home-town paper, describing the thing as adventure and actually making the charge about the leader exposing his life murderously among Andean precipices.

One or two of the other members, too, felt kinder scary about riding a mule over some of the dizzy places, and accordingly got off and walked across. These men quite obviously felt minor thrills; they had something which they would class as Adventure.

ANOTHER instance. Upon a certain occasion—in the flat jungle country, this was—we had to pass through a tremendous swamp, about eleven miles across. As cussed luck would have it, the bull-carts carrying the baggage got mired within the first two hundred yards. After messing about in the rain for some hours the rest of the party decided to go on ahead to the next camping-place where there was an Indian village, while I stayed behind with two of the crowd to nurse the baggage. It happened that these two were both tenderfoot scientists. They assisted me by finding an island in the swamp and huddling under a palm-tree while the rain ran down their necks. I cussed bulls and swore at drivers, all of us up to our waists in muck, for some five hours. Finally I got all the bulls together, eleven yoke, and hauled one cart out of the mess to better ground. Then I collected all the bed-rolls, loaded them into a dug-out canoe, and hitched on to the cart-tail; thence proceeded in style.

BY THIS time it was getting on toward evening. We had no guide, the Indian having gone on with the first crowd, so we hurried all we knew, following the tracks. Of course darkness overtook us long before we had got anywhere—and following a track in water by the aid of a flashlight isn't all pie. Well, we sloshed about in that mess for eight hours. Theoretically we rode; but the poor mules would flounder into holes every now and then, and then it would be a helluva job to mount again. Did you ever have to lead a mule beast out of a pool and then try to climb on to him out of waist-deep water? I don't know why, but it's a giddy gymnastic stunt. And once an electric eel got under my mule and shocked him clear along fore and aft. I prayed faster than a buzz-saw; but he didn't fall that time. Eventually, in the thin beginnings of dawn—when we didn't need it, because we would see our way in another hour—we heard cattle lowing and so got our direction to the camp.

Later those men confessed to me, one of them, that he felt so tired and despondent floundering around in the dark, that he wanted to get off and just lie down in the shallowest place he could find and to —— with fevers and snakes and everything. The other, who was of a much more emotional nature, told me that he was deliberately contemplating suicide during the last half of the ride to save himself from further horrors.

Now those men, again, had experienced an adventure; one of them a vastly more thrilling one than the other; showing clearly that the thrill was a matter of temperament.

YET another instance. Before getting into the Indian country, while we were still in the half-inhabited district of the Yungas where sundry hard cases who have run away from justice are supposed to hide up, I was quite a way ahead of the crowd, hoping to get a shot at something before the chatter of the gang would scare everything out of the whole countryside. It's impossible, by the way, to prevent scientificos from shrieking with delight and chattering about every new bend in the trail. Well, a man, just an ordinary unkempt sort of beggar, carrying a Winchester rifle, stepped into the road and stopped me. All he wanted was a match. Mine were all wet and no good; so the man similarly stopped the next comers to try his luck. One of the crowd had read books at some time in his life; and he must have seen motion pictures too, and listened to some goof in La Paz city telling about the wild and woolly Yungas—they do just that thing in La Paz. So this gay savant unlimbered his gun—he had to unbuckle a strap on some wonderful holster contraption—and took a crack at the inoffensive wayfarer. Of course he had never shot one off in his life before so it was all right.

But that guy had an adventure. He had shot at a man. Isn't it just temperament?

I'll tell you another.

I SHOT a big cayman in a lake which we were "discovering;" and I swam out and put a noose over its head and towed it in. We hauled it out and measured it—seventeen feet and a bit—then we went to the tents to get the snapshot cameras. When we came back the —— thing had turned round and disappeared in the lake again.

Well, it was one of the *other* fellows who had a dizzy fit at the thought.

Just difference in temperament, isn't it?

You'll understand, of course, that the foregoing isn't a blurb setting myself up to be one of those hard, iron-nerved guys who are shaken by nothing. It's just a comparison of how certain events affect different natures. It seems clear to me that the same happenings affect varying temperaments with varying degrees of intensity. The more emotional natures get a gasp and a thrill where the less emotional just swear at the natural cussedness of things. The sensitive imagination has an adventure where the less excitable one experiences just a mean day's travel.

What do *you* think? What does Camp-Fire think? What constitutes Adventure anyhow?

Gosh! Six pages, single spaced! I quit right here.

I EXPECT to be back in N. Y. some time in July or August. As soon as I'm all doctored up again, I lead the remnant of the expedish up the Rio Negro and the Rio Waupes in an attempt to bust through to Bogota. "Lead" means getting stuck with all the mean work; making arrangements, buying tickets, haggling with porters, hiring canoes, collecting a supply of trade-goods—I've got to take up three tons of beads and mirrors and knives and junk. And when the attempt fails, as it probably will, the goop who is called leader gets the blame.

And I'm —— sure it will fail, because we've been held up here on account of health and steamboat connections for six weeks—at least, it will be six weeks before I can get out; and that means that the rains will hit us just half-way up the Waupes River; and then there ain't no more travel till next dry season.

But there's a story about Amazon women somewhere up the Waupes River; and who would object to being the guests of an Amazon tribe during a rainy season?

This time I really quit.—GORDON MACCREAGH.

HERE are two letters on killing game—on what is sport and what is slaughter, what is justified and what is not:

Rockford, Illinois.

There are two subjects upon which I have decided opinions. One is useless killing with either rod or gun, and the other is out-of-door recreation for indoor people. Recreation which really recreates. Recreation taken as far from the settled districts as possible, and I know of no greater incentive for such wanderings than the pursuit of either fish, flesh or fowl.

I DO quite a little hunting and fishing, but I always try to give the game a sporting chance and I absolutely refuse to kill anything for which there is not a legitimate use. I believe in light tackle, artificial baits with few hooks and small-bore guns which are not repeaters.

How in the name of sport can you fish for anything less than whales with a fifty-pound-test line and how in the name of fair play can you use a dozen hooks on a single bait? What chance has any small game with a good shot armed with a ten ga. or a twelve ga. automatic or repeater? And what is sport except the taking and giving of chances, fair play?

THE school which holds that none of God's creatures should be killed is in my opinion, too extreme. They are wrong on physiology, dietetics and ethics. We have had to give up our mint juleps (and my mint-bed was just nicely started), but what devotee of the "Red Gods" wants to be deprived also of his Brunswick stew, chicken Maryland, juicy porterhouse, or roast duck with sweet potatoes? And what will they do with Thanksgiving Day?

However there is a wide gulf between the killing of a fish for supper or enough game for the table and the boasts of the "sportsman" who tells of taking so many *pounds* of black bass or trout or bagging his limit for so many days straight and who then buries his catch or leaves it lying in the woods to be an offense to decent people. Where is the sport in wanton slaughter as compared with the real pleasure of a day spent with rod or gun drinking in the beauties of wood and field and stream, studying the habits, characteristics and lives of the wild creatures, returning at night with enough game for a meal, tired, happy, refreshed, renewed in spirit and wiser and more appreciative of God's good world by one more day of intelligent and appreciative observation? The more I fish and the more I hunt, the less I kill and the more I find myself lost in contemplation of the stage setting for Nature's great drama.

HOW much more thrill there is in landing three feet of fighting Northern pike or three and one-half pounds of wild-eyed bass with a light rod, a line so small that it is often not strong enough to hold the dead weight of the fish, and a single-hooked artificial bait compared to derricking the poor thing out of the water at the end of a hawser with hooks sticking all over the poor thing, both inside and out. Then, too, if magazine-guns of large bore are sporting and desirable, why are they being legislated against?

When in the name of all that is relevant will "sporting" magazines quit printing stories and photographs of great and unreasonable kills and instead begin to stress the joys that come of a successful battle where the game is given an even chance or maybe a little the best of it? There are lots of real game-hogs who are absolutely law abiding and who do not know their sins. If *Adventure* can help to awaken their consciences it will have done one more wonderful thing.—ROYDEN E. TULL, D. D. S.

Hay Island, Gananoque, Ontario, Canada.

I am inclined to think, "Einsteinically," that all argument is relative. There seems to be an almost impenetrable film between layers of understanding. Sometimes an act of will based on curiosity will pierce it, or a slow abrasion of incident after incident strikes the right chord, will let in light. I had to kill more than one wounded rabbit before I stopped shooting them. Quite a few partly shattered ducks slanted into the distant bottomless marsh before I gave *that* up.

IT IS because I believe there is no lasting good in hasty cures of any kind that I still regard fishing as a sport. I will not try to argue that I use only plugs and catch no more than the camp will gladly eat. I enjoy catching them. When an old bull of a bass starts in to churn the water around my canoe I do thoroughly enjoy it. I get a thrill out of it—a thrill that is an integral part of the struggle for life. It is the lust of the chase, diluted, like a little whisky in a lot of clear sparkling water. I am tapering off on that. I intend it to be a long taper and a sure one—which is enough of that for one life.

To be aware, to understand what killing means, is to acquire for the first time a dim consciousness of one's membership in the clan of mankind. One is no longer a proud super-beast striking down in fierce pleasure or need an animal not clever enough to do its killing at a distance. It is like putting a ray filter over the lens of a camera. When the whys and wherefores of killing are isolated and put in order, what has appeared as chimerical and nebulous, if at all, suddenly assumes the shapes of a whole new world of ethics. One becomes acutely aware of the awful power that is man, and with awareness comes responsibility. No longer can we shelter unconsciously with those of whom was said "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." One more step is taken on that path on which our feet may straggle but never turn back.

WHAT penalties there may be for delaying that step—or any other, I do not know. Emerson may have mentioned it in his essay on Compensation. But I do believe that in all this blessed Cosmos there is a tit for every tat, a sweet reasonableness that is the cement which binds every bounding atom in the Universe. So why not appeal to the funny-bone, man's sense of humor, which is the seat of the intellect? A white man is not in the scale of the trained seal, getting a bit of fish for his trick, or the Congo black whose eye to the bull-whip keeps him up to scratch. He has been, of course, until recently. For instance, honesty has been his best *policy*, until it was discovered that Honesty for its own sake was such a superior brand that the joke was on the other fellow. We are all going to think seriously about this matter of killing—"eventually—why not now?"

"Here endeth—etc."—W. A. STAEBLER.

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Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send your *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Mid-July, 1919.—GOMER JONES, 211 Church St., Taylor, Pa.

WILL BUY: Two copies of each issue, from November, 1910 to April, 1918.—RICHARD ZORN, 408 West Broadway, North Baltimore, Ohio.

WILL BUY: Jan. 18th, 1919, issue, or typewritten copy of poem entitled, "The Claws of the Tropic," contained in that issue.—CARL H. STERK, 213 Genesee Bank Bldg., Flint, Mich.

WILL SELL: One hundred and fifty-nine issues. Oct., 1913 to March, 1922. Price, twenty-five dollars. Complete.—JOHN H. MACKEY, 31 East Ashley St., Jacksonville, Fla.

WILL SELL: Any copy 1919, 1920, 1921 and most of 1918, at five cents each, postpaid.—FRED. E. WILKINS, 24 Cherry Street, Danvers, Mass.

WILL SELL: A few of 1917. All of 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921. Letters of inquiry must contain stamped, addressed envelope.—F. A. CARPENTER, 271 Main St., Franklin, Mass.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Assn. of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. *(See next section.)*

2. ★ The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. *(Postage 5 cents.)*

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. *(Postage 5 cents.)*

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star,* Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. *(Postage 8 cents.)*

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. *(Postage 5 cents.)*

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1 Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage* 12 *cents.*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

17. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

23. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

25. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

26. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

27. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

28. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

29. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

30. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

31. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

32. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

33. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

34. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Mount Vernon, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

35. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

36. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage* 3 *cents.*)

37. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

38. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

39. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Parts of Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Except portions mentioned below. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

40. Western U. S. Part 2 Parts of Utah and Ariz.
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Cliff Dwellings, Two Grey Peaks, the Carrizo Mts., Cañon De Chelley, Chin Lee Wash, the Moonlight Country, the Blue Mts. (Utah), Navaho Indian Reservation in general. Pack trips, prospecting, hunting, camping, trapping and mining; habits, etc., of Navaho Indians.

41. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 1727 Lafayette St., Denver, Colo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

48. Middle Western U S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncracies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating,

river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

51. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

52. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

New "Ask Adventure" Sections

IT WILL pay you to look over the matter which appears on pages 183 and 184, and at the top of this page, if you have not done so recently. Sections added in the last twelvemonth are those now numbered 7, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 48, 50; also "Old Songs That Men Have Sung" and "Mountains and Mountaineering" and the first item under "Standing Information."

More about Navigating the Mississippi

A READER volunteers some supplementary facts—also a good story which, to me at least, is new:

Nymore, Minn.

In the February 18th issue of *Adventure* you answer an inquiry in regard to houseboating down the Mississippi.

Perhaps I have a little data along that line that might be of some aid to you.

I have traveled on the Mississippi, Ohio, Kentucky and Missouri Rivers with floating theaters, otherwise known as show-boats. Made the trip to New Orleans and return, and I wish to say that any one attempting to make the trip with a houseboat of any size, sure needs an engine or they're in for a bunch of grief.

Houseboats standing high out of the water and having a shallow draft are very susceptible to a cross-river wind. With a boat equipped only with sweeps it means a bunch of hard work to keep offshore. I have seen boats so equipped wind-bound for days at a stretch.

Some boats are equipped with a four or six horsepower engine, while others have a 1½ or a 2 h. p. engine in a skiff or "John boat" for towing-purposes. The old "Missi" is as tricky a "creek" as there is in the world; and it pays to have a "kicker" handy, 'cause you can never tell when you might need quick action.

And, if you will pardon me for contradicting you, in some places the old stream has a six-mile current. You have undoubtedly heard the story of the nigger that started out to row from N. O. to St. Louis.

He started just at nightfall, and rowed steadily all night, bucking the current. When morning came he was only about two miles above where he started. A boy on the bank who knew him called—

"Hello, Sam."

Sam looked over to the bank and said—

"I wonda what niggah in St. Louis knows me?"

In regards to fishing: Still fishing is about the only thing there is. Of course after you are down along the Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana shore there is excellent fishing in near-by lakes and ponds and small rivers. The fishing in these streams includes big-mouth black bass, goggle-eye perch, crappie, channel cat and a number of others.

A last word in regard to the boat. Any one who buys a second-hand boat without first having an

exterior view of the bottom of it is a plumb fool and taking his life in his hands when he goes a-voyaging in that kind of a craft. A new boat is the "best bet."—J. H. THORNTON (late capt. com. Troop B, 4th Cav., U. S. A.).

Answer, by Capt. Hanson:—It was with much interest as well as profit that I read your letter. You gave me some good pointers on the Mississippi, which stream you must know very thoroughly if you have traveled it on show-boats; I guess they get, one time and another, about all the grief there is coming.

I don't know anything about navigating the Mississippi below Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, never having been below that point by river; and I don't claim to. You will notice that my department in "Ask Adventure" only covers the Missouri Valley, but I often get questions, like the one which you noticed in the February 18th issue, which involve matters outside my territory which I have to touch upon in a general way.

I realize, of course, that in some places and in high stages of water the current of the Mississippi is a good deal faster than three miles per hour, just as it is faster than four miles per hour in the Missouri at certain places and times, especially up in Montana. What I meant to indicate was an average. There is no question, either, but that a motor would be most desirable, as I indicated to Mrs. Corey, and it may be more absolutely necessary on the Mississippi than on the Missouri. I never navigated the Missouri myself for any distance except with a motor-boat, but I have met along the river and talked with a number of men who were going down with sails, for use in favorable wind, and either oars or sweeps and who told me that, on the Missouri at least, they found this mode of locomotion satisfactory.

That's a good story about the nigger that thought he'd reached St. Louis after he'd started out from New Orleans and rowed all night. He had undoubtedly rowed hard enough to be justified in thinking so; it beats all how hard you have to row sometimes just to keep from going down-stream.

I judge from your letter that you feel about our Western rivers a good deal as I do; there's a big fascination about them. I think if I had been born a generation earlier I would certainly have been a steamboat pilot, so it's probably just as well that I wasn't.

Books on the South Seas

AGAIN let me urge inquirers to make their questions specific. No one man could fully satisfy the requirements of the subjoined letter, if he wrote till he was a hundred:

Question:—"Would you kindly send me any information you may have on the South Sea Islands, in regard to geography, natives, customs, equipment, climate, living conditions, expenses, sports?" —FRED M. ADAMS, Elgin, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—I am listing a few of the books that will cover questions that you might desire an answer to. These books are absolutely reliable.

"White Shadows in the South Seas," by Frederick O'Brien; "Mystic Isles of the South Seas," by Frederick O'Brien; "Tahiti Days," by Hector MacQuarrie; "In the Tracks of the Trades," by Lewis R. Freeman; "Southeastern Pacific Lands," by Fletcher Christian; "The Cruise of the Snark," by Jack London; "The Log of the Snark," by Charmian K. London.

Names and addresses of "Ask Adventure" department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Horn-Shedding Deer

AND a few words about boiling beans a mile up:

Question:—There has always been a time-worn question arising in my life. And as yet I have not been able to secure a dependable answer.

What I want to know is this.

Do deer shed their horns completely every year?

'Most every one says that they do. But for the life of me I can't figure it out.

When a buck is one year of age he has a spike; at the age of two, a fork. And so on. When he gets about six or eight years of age he has several points, the number being equal to that of his age.

All that is perfectly clear to me. But what gets me is this. If it takes a buck six years to acquire six points, and if he sheds them all, how can he grow them all back beside one more the following year?

I admit I don't know much about big game, so if you will kindly explain this matter to me I can at last let my mind rest in regard to this question.

Now I have another question.

I have been told by an Indian that if I should kill a deer and examine it thoroughly, I would find under his flanks a tuft of red hair or bristles which could be used as an excellent lure for trout. Now this was a new one on me. Can you give me any light?

Thanking you in advance.—GEO. E. SEARS, Marina, Calif.

P. S.—Another little thing that is bothering me. How high does the altitude have to be in order to hinder one from cooking beans? What causes this? Does the water have anything to do with it? Or is there any truth in this saying? I would like very much to learn how to make sourdough bread—the kind that you leave in a pot and keep adding to it as you use it.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—It is true that deer shed their horns every year, save for a few exceptions. Their horns are scientifically known as deciduous horns from that fact. I have watched tame deer and wild deer, and I know that they do it. Every hunter knows it.

It is just as easy as it is for a bulbous plant to increase its stalks annually, till it reaches its limit. I plant a bulb of a certain kind. It sends up a single stalk next Spring. In another year it may send up four or five. In two years a dozen. Just so a deer-horn may be a spike, then have one prong, then two, and so on.

At first the horns are covered with a fleshy substance called the velvet. When the horn is mature the velvet dries and is rubbed off against rough-barked trees. Just why this is so is as puzzling as

it is that toads should have such rough backs or a calf be spotted. It is just the "nature of the beast," that is all.

I never noticed that red tuft you mention. It can not be very red. Not noticeably so, for I have handled many hides and am fairly observant, and yet I have never noticed it. I have seen a reddish dun patch on some bucks. It was brighter in the flank than elsewhere.

You will begin to notice the difficulty in boiling potatoes or beans at about 5,000 feet elevation. It is due to rarefication of the air, which reduces the atmospheric pressure, letting water boil at a less degree of heat, therefore with less cooking-power.

The water has nothing to do with it, other than being evaporated under a lower heat. It is acted upon, not acting, in the matter.

Sourdough bread-making has been detailed in *Adventure* twice last year, in "A. A." departments. Look over the back numbers and you will get the whole dope, written out by experts.

The Japanese Word *Maru* Again

THIS correspondence supplements an item by Mrs. Knudson which appeared 'way back—Mid-September issue, 1921, to be exact. *The Literary Digest* for January 7, 1922, also had something to say about the word (page 52). Incidentally it bore out Mrs. Knudson's opinion that the original meaning was "round:"

Mt. Vernon, Ill.

I was interested in Mrs. Knudson's answer to query regarding the meaning of the Japanese word *maru* in a recent issue, but it is not exactly in accordance with the results of a rather arduous search I made as to its meaning while in Japan in 1920.

The original meaning of the word is a circle, and it represents the circle which in former days always encircled or enclosed the Japanese characters designating the name of the vessel or its ownership, always to be found on the sails of all Japanese sailing-vessels. With the advent of the steamship and the formation of a Japanese merchant marine the Japanese Government passed a law making the use of the word compulsory on these ships. According to some it carries the idea that the ships of Japan go out and come back, and carries perhaps the secret idea that Japan is the center of all things, which is quite consistent with their general attitude as witnessed by an article in the Japanese paper *Niroku* stating, "The imperial family of Japan is the parent not only of her sixty millions but of all mankind on earth."—T. J. MATHEWS.

In a letter written to the "A. A." department Mrs. Knudson comments on Mr. Mathews' conclusions as follows:

I'm greatly interested in what Mr. Mathews has to say regarding the Japanese word *maru*.

You will note that in my letter to Mr. Rigsby I call attention to its probable origin—derivation from an ancient Japanese word which meant round. I surmise both Mr. Mathews and myself are right in the conclusions we have reached, each from our own sources of information. It has been my experience before this that several people might run certain things in Oriental life to the ground to come out with several distinct versions of the same thing. Obscurity is a particular trick of Japanese derivations. One may often "pay your money and take your choice," I find.

Basil Hall Chamberlain bears me out in most of what I have already said and what I have learned myself about the word. And I find that Terry says of *maru*, "the mystical affix, *maru* (which means circularity; the division of a castle; a round thing; a sword, etc.").

I'd like to see Mr. Mathews' letter published and invite a further discussion of the word. I surmise some one who reads *Adventure* may have other interesting conclusions to add.

I might say this—the information I have already passed on was given me by the president of one of Japan's largest steamship lines. Maybe he was "spoofing" me.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

The Perils of Mountain-Climbing

DANGEROUS sport for the inexperienced, as is shown by the yearly death-toll of the Alps:

Question:—"I would like to hear from you on mountain-climbing, its perils, deaths met, sacrifices and results derived to promote our welfare, social and educational."—S. J. SMITH, Darby, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Bent:—Your question is not one which can be answered in a few words, and I think that I can help you more by reference to the literature than by specific answers. But at least I will try to answer you.

The perils of mountain-climbing are those of any life in which one is far separated from civilization. But particularly one runs the danger of falling from perpendicular cliffs or of having things fall upon one. Then crevasses in the ice, often concealed by snow, are a constant source of danger. Death by exposure and freezing is also a possibility. Mountaineering is a fine art, and when practised by those who have not proper training is apt to be fatal. But experienced climbers seldom come to grief.

Deaths in mountain-climbing are usually confined to those places where high mountains are accessible to the inexperienced. Such a place is Switzerland. One hundred and seven alpine "tourists" were killed in 1921, in the central and eastern Alps, mostly from falls.

Mountain-climbers do not think of their art as involving sacrifice. To them it is the greatest pleasure on earth.

Some scientific results are gained by mountain-climbing, particularly at high altitudes, but as the same heights are much more easily attained by airplanes this work is of no great consequence. Foremost in the mountaineering world just now is the attempt to reach the summit of Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain (29,141 feet). On an expedition such as this a great deal of scientific work is done, but is mostly concerned with the exploratory nature of the trip rather than the mountain-climbing.

Let me recommend the following books:

"The Conquest of Mt. McKinley," by Belmore Brown; "The Complete Mountaineer," by G. D. Abraham; "Mountaineering," by W. M. Conway, Encyclopedia Britannica; "Mountaineering," by C. T. Dent; "Scrambles among the Alps," by E. Whymper.

Tasmania

THE color-scheme, as indicated by Mr. Goldie, sounds decidedly interesting:

Question:—I would like to know if the island of Tasmania offers a good future for one in the prime of life, with about $5,000 capital, desiring to go in farming; not so much to acquire wealth, but rather to make a good comfortable living in good natural surroundings, among congenial people.

I would also like to know the climatic conditions of the island, if the inhabitants are amiable toward Americans, and if one fond of fishing and nature would find plenty to keep him interested."—EDWARD R. REEH, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—If you do not mind living so far from Broadway, and desire a peaceful life in an Eden-like country, you could not do better than to settle in Tasmania. This beautiful island has suffered less from the war than the greater part of the world, and is on the whole in a prosperous condition. Tasmania has attractions for both the settler and the tourist. The island, which is 2,625 square miles in extent, is like one big garden, and is one of the chief holiday resorts of the commonwealth.

One of its principal industries is that of fruit-growing, which is rapidly extending. All the world over Tasmanian apples are noted for their aroma and delicious flavor. It has been found by experience that the rich agricultural land does not produce the best fruit, and that second-class land, if it possesses a clay sub-soil, yields a better return. The result has been the selection of a large quantity of what may be termed inferior land to plant out with orchards. With the amount of capital you mention, you ought, if you wish to go in for fruit-growing, to be able to acquire a very nice ready-made orchard on easy terms, which will give you a comfortable living.

The climate is particularly good. It is equable, invigorating and bracing. The average temperature at Hobart, the capital city, in the hottest month is 62.3 degrees, and the average temperature in the coldest month, 45.3 degrees. Hot nights and hot winds are unknown, and an occasional high thermometer is soon cooled by sea breezes and mountain air.

The people of Tasmania are extremely amiable and hospitable. and have a kindly feeling not only toward Americans, but toward any tourists or settlers from abroad. Agriculture in Tasmania is on the whole profitable, though first-class land is not easy to obtain.

It would be advisable for you to write to the Superintendent of the Immigration and Tourists' Bureau, Hobart, Tasmania, and give him full particulars of exactly the class of farming you want to do, how far out from the centers of population you would feel disposed to settle, and generally what your needs would be. He would no doubt be able to submit you some definite proposition which would save you the necessity of coming out in the blind.

Crown land laws of Tasmania are very liberal. They are classified as first class from one pound per acre, second class from ten shillings per acre, and third class from five shillings per acre. If credit conditions be taken, interest is added to the upset price, and payment may be made by instalments extending over a term of years. The *bona-fide* selector is accorded every reasonable consideration. I would be very glad to give you any other information you may need, but I have no doubt that the Government Tourist Department will assist you to secure the sort of farm you want.

You mention fishing. Tasmania, being an island, the opportunities for sea fishing are unbounded. In stream and lake fishing too, Tasmania offers many attractions. Nearly all the rivers and lakes are stocked with imported salmon and trout. The island also offers good sport with the gun.

Altogether Tasmania is a charming country. Its scenery is unexceled in the world, its people simple and good-natured, its present Government progressive, and its industrial possibilities unlimited. It is a place where blue skies and blue waters blend their colors with the rich reds of apples and the rosy cheeks of beautiful women.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Fishing in Southern B. C.

WHERE good little fishermen go when they die:

Question:—"Am taking advantage of your kind offer in *Adventure* to ask you to tell me some good spot in the southwestern part of British Columbia where the wife and I can get some good brook trout. We intend spending about five weeks in that part of the country sight-seeing and thought you might know of some particularly good place. We are both at home with fly and canoe."—M. A. ELLIOT, Milestone, Sask., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—There is just one place in southern B. C. where you can find good fishing. That is anywhere. The Okanagan, the Kootenay and the Coast countries are all good fishing-spots. All you need to find is sufficient water to cover a fish comfortably, and it is safe that the fish will be there.

With five weeks at your disposal, however, I am going to earnestly recommend that you come through to Vancouver, cross to Nanaimo and spend a few weeks in going bugs over the beauties of Vancouver Island. This is one spot that stands in a class by itself with regard to both scenery and fishing. If I were to begin telling you of some of the fishing I have actually seen done there you would say to yourself:

"Ah! I have evidently been in error all these years, since while I was always led to believe that it was Lazarus who was raised from the dead, I now perceive that it was quite another party, to wit, one Ananias."

Seriously, I am sure you would be well repaid by a trip to the island; but if this is not practical, Kuskinook, Penticon, Sicamous, or almost any place one may name in southern B. C. will furnish you with plenty of sport and a most enjoyable outing.

"Pepper-Boxes"

THIS question and answer are published not only for the intrinsic value of the information, but also in order to indicate what descriptive details it is necessary to give to Mr. Barker in order to enable him to reply intelligently:

Question:—"I would like a bit of information regarding an old revolver. It has four barrels which you have to revolve after each shot. The hammer looks a good deal like that of an old shotgun, but it's hollow on the end. It is made of brass and has a wooden butt and the letters "I. E. H." marked on it. Can you give me an idea how old it is, also its value and where I could sell it? I have it from a Norwwegian mate who died of the flu in N. Y. City.—NEAL GAUW, Minneapolis, Minn.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—It is impossible for me to determine from your brief description what the pistol (it is not a revolver) is. You should have told me the length—length of barrels, caliber, whether percussion or cartridge, and whether the barrels are all in one solid piece or separate. If it was made to be revolved by hand, which I assume you mean, I am particularly puzzled. It may be that the revolving mechanism is broken or taken off.

About the only "pepper-box" (which is what I take this one to be) that revolves by hand is a three-barreled Allen, .31 caliber, with barrels in one solid piece.

I should judge this to be a percussion-cap pistol, and probably made abroad. Are not the letters that you take to be "I. E. H.," "E. L. G." like this:

E
L G
*

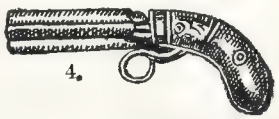
With a star beneath. That is the Belgian proof-mark.

1.

2.

The only two four-barreled "pepper-boxes" at all known I have illustrated above. and below this paragraph. No. 1 is an Allen & Wheelock, patented 1845-1857, in which the barrels are as you may see in the second sketch, all in one piece, bored out. Six inches long, barrel two and seven-eighths inches.

3.



4.

Sketches 3 and 4 show front and side views of a piece of Belgian manufacture, marked, "Mariette Brevete" on the steel frame near the bottom and inside of the stock. In this piece, as you may see by the third sketch, the barrels are separate, and each unscrews from the frame. I have them with stocks and frame from three to four inches, and with barrels from two and seven-eighths to three and one-quarter inches, to considerably longer. These latter are a very finely finished gun, the frames being engraved and the barrels both engraved and of Damascus steel.

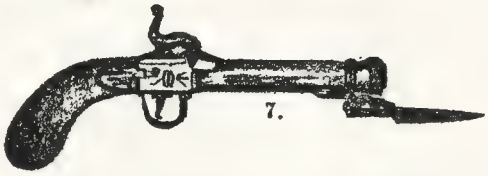
Omitting the fact that neither of these is made of brass, the hammer on the Allen is a flat one, only capable of self cocking, and on the Belgian the hammer is underneath. (Above the trigger, and can not be seen in the sketch.) As I understand you, your hammer is like sketch 5 to some degree:

5.

This is the hammer on an Allen & Thurber of a very rare type, so rare that I have seen but two others beside my own, and know of several large collections without one. Do not mistake me. I do not mean that the type of hammer is rare, but that the Allen & Thurber of that type is rare. It has six barrels all bored out of one piece, and would look to you, save for the hammer, very much like sketch 1.

If, as I judge from what little you tell me, your pistol is Belgian, the value is probably not great. However, from your description I am so at a loss to determine just what you have that I can not tell you at all definitely.

6.



7.

Above (sketches 6 and 7) I have indicated examples of hammers, which I judge are similar to yours, on each of two Belgian brass-barreled pistols.

I shall be very glad to help you further, as well as being curious to see what the piece is. I would suggest this: If you will send it to me by parcel post (which is perfectly safe; I have many come that way; expecting four much larger than yours from Missouri any day) I will tell you exactly what it is and its value.

Also, if it is of any value I will either buy it myself, or find a purchaser for you, or return it to you, as you may desire me to do. I presume that the magazine is sufficient guarantee of my responsibility, or I can refer you to various intimate friends in your city.

Collectors may be interested to know that Mr. Gauw sent the weapon on to Mr. Barker, who decided that it was probably a home-made firearm of no recognized type, and that therefore its value to collectors was problematical, especially as it was not in first-class condition.

A One-Man Cruise across the Pacific

DON'T do it:

Question:—"Being a sailor by occupation I have come to such a position that upon my discharge from the Marine Corps, I would like to buy a boat capable of crossing the Pacific to Australia by calling in at various islands *en route*. I have heard of a San Pedro, Cal., man sailing from San Pedro to Honolulu and back by himself, and now this same man is on his way to Marquesas Islands. The boat he uses is about thirty feet long, and sloop rigged. Could you give me all dope on these questions?

What would a new boat about thirty feet long with an eight or nine foot beam, and seven or eight feet depth cost on the Pacific Coast? Does the price include rigging and sails?

Would you recommend those dimensions? I would like a boat with a flush deck and a cabin capable of holding two persons, with storage space fore and aft. What would sails for such a boat cost, and what equipment would you recommend?

Would a boat of that size stand the heavy weather likely to be encountered in mid-ocean?

I have raced small open yachts for a considerable time, and I also have a fair idea of navigation both by dead reckoning and observation.

I would prefer having my name withheld."——, care of Marine Guard, U. S. S. *Oklahoma*, care of Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Brown:—Answering your questions generally, I would not recommend any such cruise as you contemplate in any boat of the dimensions you speak of. While a man gets by with it once in a while, it is a desperate chance to take. Two men could handle a well-built, seaworthy yawl of some forty feet or even a trifle less, but certainly not less than thirty-five feet over all, in the open water, still with the chance of encountering mighty heavy weather where the most expert seamanship will be required to get by. In a thirty-five footer you could make the run to Honolulu, and, if you avoid the hurricane season and belt, you could go farther south in it.

Some $600 or $700 would probably, if you have luck, buy such a vessel as you would need. If you built, the cost would be higher. It would be better to have a "kicker" to take you in and out of port and carry you through the doldrums, if necessary. But don't try any of this one-man stuff on long cruises, unless you want your heirs to cash in your insurance policy.

Hot Chicken Tamales

A RECIPE to make your mouth water—my mouth anyway:

Question:—"I have tried unsuccssfully to get a recipe book on Mexican dishes, especially one on how to make hot chicken tamales. Can you give me any information along this line?"—J. C. Smith, Vancouver, B. C.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—The first thing is to take corn, preferably white corn, and put it in a pot, about half full of corn and the rest water, adding about a handful of slaked lime, boiling for three or four hours. Then you wash it throughly in cold water, rubbing the corn between your hands to get the hulls off. Then you grind the corn very fine in a meat-chopper or regular corn-mill. After the corn is ground, lard, pepper, and salt to taste.

The chicken is boiled in water, adding thyme, bay-leaves, pepper, salt and chopped onion to flavor.

To make the chile sauce take the dried red chillies and boil them until perfectly soft, removing seeds, and grind the chillies until soft. Then the ground chillies are strained through cheese-cloth to remove the skins. Then you add some of the chicken broth to the chile, making a rather thick paste of it, and then you take all the bones out of the chicken meat, cutting it up in small pieces.

Then take good clean corn shucks without splits and wash them thoroughly. Take one husk and take a spoonful of the ground corn and spread it on the shuck in a rather thin layer, then put in two or three pieces of chicken meat, two olives, three or four raisins, and a spoonful of the chile paste. Then you proceed to put some more ground corn on another shuck and start wrapping it around the first one, wrapping three more to complete the tamale, each shuck with its layer of ground corn.

Tie the ends of the tamale with strips of husks, right up close to the ball of meat inside the first shucks, not tying the strips way out on the ends, making a fat tamale. Tie another strip in the middle of the tamale, not too tight. Then *steam* the tamales, not being submerged in the water, having the boiler covered for three hours, more or less. Before putting in the boiler cut off the extra ends of the shucks.

I do not know of any cook-book with these recipes as there are as many ways of making tamales, chile con carne, enchilades and so on as there are people making them. In case you want any more recipes write again and I will try to get them for you.

The Bahamas as an Abode

ANDROS Island, too, has its points:

Question:—"What locality, in your experience, would be most favorable for one to go and rest up tired nerves? A place where the people, in a general way, would be the most agreeable, and the living cost the minimum? It would help very much if one could procure a plot of land, build a camp, go fishing, or any means could be employed that would help reduce the living cost. Can you recall such a place in the West Indian group?

In yours of March 30 you mentioned that there were many places that the chances were better than in Bermuda. My objective is to find a place in a warm climate, where a small sum of money will go the longest way. I find the Winters here very disagreeable. Any information will be greatly appreciated."—Moses Wheeler, Atkinson, N. H.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—There are very many spots where a man may live, camp style, on a moderate amount of cash, if he is not particular about the color of his neighbors. Almost any of the islands of the Bahamas except New Providence would suit you. You could buy a piece of land big enough to raise bananas and vegetables and keep goats, sheep, or pigs, where you could do all the fishing you wanted, for comparatively little, and

you'd find the people fine—but they would be negroes, of course.

I don't know your ideas about this. My own are not by any means the usual American's. I can get along very well with the happy black fellow, and always found him decent if he was treated decently.

J. S. Johnson & Co., of Nassau, have great interests in pineapple-growing, sisal hemp, and sponge industries, and perhaps a letter to them may result in getting you some idea of what a bit of sea-front land would cost; or they might be able to offer you some employment down there. My notion in mentioning this firm, however, is simply that they hold some 20,000 acres of land on Andros Island alone, and I have no doubt would gladly sell a bit of it. Andros, too, is about the best of the islands, full of game and fish, and thickly wooded, with no noxious beasts or reptiles to bother you. Let me know if you want further guidance.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

FRASER, ALEXANDER. Born 1877. Last heard from in 1899. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address CHAS. FRASER, Roslyn, Long Island, N.Y.

McKEEFERY, FRANK J. (Father.) Left Philadelphia sixteen years ago. Age forty-one, height five feet six inches; tending to baldness. Lost tip of one finger. Last heard of in Detroit and Chicago. Structural iron-worker. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MISS MARIA McKEEFERY, 213 Dickinson St., Phila., Pa.

TRAYNOR, W. J. H. Newspaper publisher. Formerly of Detroit, Michigan. Any information will be appreciated.—Address THEO. BARTLEY, 411 South St., Utica, N. Y.

RIDENOUR, O. If you see this, write me. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write his pal.—Address W. V. HENDERSON, Box 298, Abilene, Texas.

HOOD, HERBERT JAMES. Last seen in Buffalo, N. Y. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address M. HOOD, 625 Pine St., Riverside, Cal.

FLEMING, CYRUS. Canadian born. Last heard of, mining in Arizona or Montana. His niece Otta would like to hear from him, or of him. Please write.—Address MRS. A. McKINNEY, care of *Adventure.*

CARTER, J. P. Last seen in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1907. Sandy hair. About five feet four inches tall, weighs 135 pounds. Civil engineer. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. R. BEYERS, Logan, Iowa.

FLYE, VERNON F. Last heard of in Western Nebraska. Working on the Union Pacific R. R. near Lyman, Neb., for the Utah Construction Co. Any information will be appreciated.—Address EVERETT L. FLYE, 514 West Archer St., Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JACKS, MILTON. Last heard from in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1918. Any information will be appreciated by his anxious sister.—Address NELLIE, care of *Adventure.*

HAMMERS, FRANK, DR. Last seen in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1914. I desire to get in touch with him. I believe he was from North Carolina or Tennessee. Any information will be appreciated.—Address DR. H. B. VAIL, Scio, Ohio.

CLINE, CHARLES. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, May, 1909. At that time working as vaudeville entertainer. Any information will be appreciated.—Address M. BLAIR, 536 27th Ave., San Francisco, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GARDNER, H. BELDEN (or Charles Deppy). Last heard from in West Superior, Minn., 1904. Age fifty-eight years. Left Michigan in search of son, Clyde. We have found Clyde. Mother is ill and would appreciate news of her son.—Address MRS. A. O. BELDEN, 1241 Hamilton Ave., East, Flint, Mich.

DAY, GEORGE E. Five feet six inches, sandy hair, weight 150 lbs., age thirty-eight. Last heard of in Chicago. Was talking S. A. Any information will be appreciated.—Address RAND DAY, 2611 De Kalb, St. Louis, Mo.

LOCKWOOD, ROBERT L. Was on the U. S. S. *Wool-sey* station at San Diego, Cal. Any one knowing his address please write.—Address F. G. WOLFE, Gen. Del., Kansas City, Mo.

SPENCE, EDMOND SHACKLEFORD. Formerly of Martinsville, Clinton County, Ohio. Age about forty-five, about six feet tall, rather heavy build, light hair and blue eyes. His address two or three years ago was 221 J St., Sacramento, Cal. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his father.—Address FRIEND P. SPENCE, Martinsville, Ohio.

MILLER, JULIUS. (Uncle.) Born in Westfield, Mass., 50 years ago. His parents died and he was taken to a Home in Springfield, Mass., and from there to Boston to a Home, and he was adopted. He has three brothers who would like to find him. Any information concerning him, or the family who adopted him, will be appreciated.—Address MRS. W. A. STREETER, 350 Deerfield St., Greenfield, Mass.

ROLINGETHIS, ANTHONY P. Was discharged from U. S. Navy, May 1914, under name of Peter Rollens. About five feet eight inches tall, brown hair, blue eyes, about 180 pounds, thirty-five years old, had cross tattooed on right arm. His mother would like to hear from him.—Address MRS. M. MARTEN, 121 McKinley Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

O'NEILL, JACK (or Jack O'Leary). Last seen in Miami, Fla., in 1920. He was at that time talking of taking a trip to South America. Age about forty-two years, five feet nine inches tall, weighs about 160 pounds. Has black hair slightly turned gray, rather dark complexion. Brick-layer by trade. He is a typical Irishman and was born and raised in the Bronx, New York. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HUGH A. BARTH, 515 Jefferson Ave., Moundsville, W. Va.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CABANISS, HARVEY. Druggist. Age thirty-seven years. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., about seven years ago. Any information as to whereabouts will be appreciated by his aunt.—Address MRS. J. RICHARD CARR, 617 Union Ave., Petersburg, Virginia.

PRUSAK, JOHNNIE. Born in East Buffalo, N. Y. Last seen in Detroit, Mich., Oct., 1920. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Cal.

PHARIS, ALFRED. Born in Idaho, E 4 Jockey. Last seen in Salt Lake City, Utah, about August, 1916. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Cal.

EHRLICH, OSCAR. Born in Old Mexico. Last seen in El Paso, Texas, April, 1917. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Cal.

BARTON, JAS. E. Born in Boston, Mass. Was night clerk, Postal Tel. Co., El Paso, Texas, April, 1917. Kindly write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Cal.

THE following have been inquired for in either the June 10th or June 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

CHILDERS, THEODORE; Fontain, Jack; Froome, Harry K.; Gallagher, Chas. J.; Gelston, Rodney S.; Graves, Dr. George C.; Hasson, Earl Stewart; Hauck, George; Jolley; Major Wade; Kassimir; Haji; King, Capt. Billie; Lee Preston; McCloud, John Herny; McDevitt, Andrew, John; Mi[illegible]l, Frank (Big Mike); Munro, James; Pale[illegible] Charles E.; [illegible]mer, Arthur; Rippley L. Eroll; Rood, Carl S.; Tarley, Wissiam S.; Siebert, Jack; Stewart, C. J.; Valdez, Alex.; Woods, Mrs. and Mr. W. M., daughter Fannie May, and son Lee.

MISCELLANEOUS—Belgian.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Addleman, Frank C.; Buckley, Ray; Bertsch, Miss Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Butterfield, M. E.; Barrett, Raymond; Bollinger, C. J.; Brown, W. E.; Bailey, Dick; Benter, Jack; Balensifer, Frank A. W.; Baptiste, Jean; Blaucher, Chas. A.; Boes, Mrs.; Courtlandt, Victor; Cook, Elliot D.; Connor, A. M.; Craun, G. F.; Chink; Clark, Wilfred J.; Corbett, Fred P.; Connor, A. M.; Coles, Bobby; Carpenter, Robert S.; Caston, O. A.; Chatvaire, J.; Cooke, Elliot D.; Coleman, J. J.; Carr, John; Cook, William N.; DeBrissac St. Ricarde; de Rouffiquac, J.; Evans, B. R.; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Farnsworth, Donald; Ford, Harry; Franklin, M. R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Grimm, H. C.; Harris, Walter J.; Howard, Charlie; Haskins, S. S.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Hughes, Frank E.; Hooker, William Francis; Hailstorm, Chief; Jones, John Paul; Jackson, Robert R.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Kelly, C. H.; Kennedy, Paul I.; Larisey, Jack; Lafler, Harry; Lee, William R. M. D.; Lonely, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Leuane, Bob; Lange, Alcot; Lovett, Harold S.; Lekki, Michot; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Mackintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Alick; Minor, Dr. John; McKee, A. L.; McNair, Henry S.; McCafferty, Charles B.; McNickles, W. A.; McGovern, T. P.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nylander, Towne J.; Nichols, Charles B.; O'Hara, Jack; Overtons, C. H.; O'Leary, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Pigeon, A. K.; Pulis, H. F.; Posner, George A.; Palmer, Jack; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner, Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Ryder, H. S.; Raymond, C. E.; Rundle, Merrill G.; Roberts, Walter; Rutherford, Max; St. Clair, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F., Pvt.; Smith, G. O.; Starr, Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Sloan, Charles A.; Stewart, Ernest J.; Schafer, George; Simonds, Frank W.; Tripp, Edward; Terry, Lambert; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Glucke, Byron; Ward, Frank; Williams, Roger; Woeller, Erich; Yames, Reuben.

MISCELLANEOUS—L. T. No. 401; Corporal; Third Officer; WS-XV; L. T. 348; No. 439; S 177284; W. W. T.; J. C. H.; 2480; T. W. S.; C. C. C.; No. 11870.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 10TH ISSUE

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Inhabitants of the hearth.

ONE LONE WHITE MAN — *Alfred Richard Wetjen*
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WAR WAMPUM A Five-Part Story Part IV — *Hugh Pendexter*
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FOR HIS FAMILY HONOR — *George E. Holt*
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THE SPIRIT OF THE FLAMES — *Clyde B. Hough*
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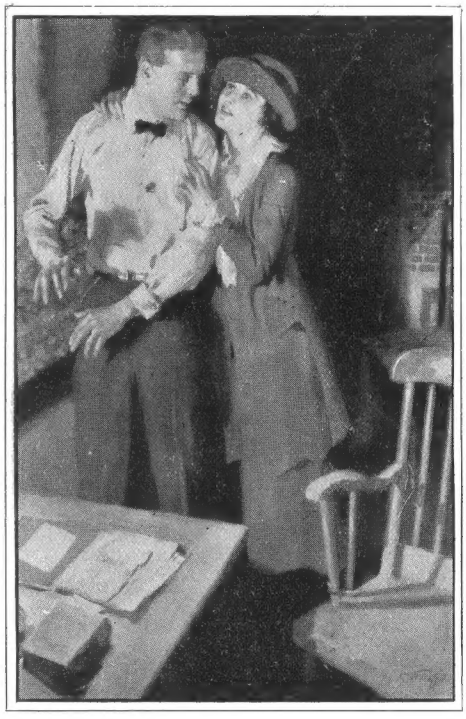

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